



AUGUST 2013 VOLUME 23 ISSUE 8

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

Sight & Sound



THE MOST EXCITING ACTRESS IN AMERICA: FRANCES HA'S **GRETA GERWIG**

PLUS

RYAN GOSLING IN 'ONLY GOD FORGIVES' • JULIAN PÖLSLER'S 'THE WALL'
DEEP FOCUS: THE ESSAY FILM • 'WADJDA' • JEAN GRÉMILLON

£4.50



The Masters of Cinema Series

JULY NEW RELEASES

D.W. GRIFFITH'S

THE BIRTH OF A NATION



One of the most artistically significant and controversial motion pictures ever made, D. W. Griffith's silent epic *The Birth of a Nation* was a massive commercial success at the time of its release, owing to its dynamic storytelling and its breakthrough developments in cinema language that have become common traits of practically every film that has since followed. However, the picture's legacy is one that continues to elicit outrage over its vulgar depictions of African-Americans and its deceptive historiography of the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century.

It's a film that's deeply divisive even to the senses of a single viewer: images of painterly beauty in composition and tonal quality often exhibit a contemptuous, inflammatory coarseness with regard to subject matter; just as frequently, long tracts evince an innocent, terrifically lyrical grandeur. Griffith would attempt to make amends for the moral schism of this schizophrenic epic in his next film, *Intolerance*, but *The Birth of a Nation* cannot — and should not — remain unseen, or undiscussed: it is a great, and terrible, masterpiece.

Special Features: • New 1080p presentation (on the Blu-ray), in its original aspect ratio • Music by the Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra in 2.0 stereo and DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 • Introductions to the film by D. W. Griffith and Walter Huston • Newly rediscovered original intermission sequence and 1930 re-release title sequence • Seven Civil War shorts directed by Griffith • A lengthy booklet with writing about the film, rare archival imagery, and more.

COMING SOON

August:

Tarnished Angels • *La Notte* •
Simon Killer

September:

Il Bidone • *Van Gogh* •
A Time to Love and a Time to Die

Both titles also available on DVD

The Birth of a Nation is released 22nd July 2013

Le Pont du Nord is released 29th July 2013

The culmination of New Wave master Jacques Rivette's legendary middle period (which ranged from *L'Amour fou* through *Out 1*, *Céline and Julie Go Boating*, *Duelle*, *Norôît*, and *Merry-Go-Round*), *Le Pont du Nord* envisions Paris as a sprawling game-board marked off with tucked-away conspiracies, where imagination and paranoia intermingle; where the hinted-at stakes are sanity, life, and death.

Regular Rivette actress Bulle Ogier stars as Marie, a claustrophobic ex-con who, shortly after wandering into Paris, encounters the wild and potentially troubled young woman Baptiste (Pascale Ogier, Bulle's actual 22-year-old daughter). Baptiste, a knife-wielding, self-proclaimed kung-fu expert with a drive to slash the eyes from faces in adverts (including, in one instance, those on a placard for Akira Kurosawa's *Kagemusha*), accompanies Marie on her quest to solve the mystery behind the contents of her former lover's (Pierre Clémenti's) suitcase: an amalgam of clippings, patterns, and maps of Paris that points to a vastly unsettling labyrinth replete with signs and intimations whose menacing endgame remains all too unclear.

SPECIAL FEATURES: • Gorgeous new 1080p presentation (on the Blu-ray) of the film in its original 1.37:1 aspect ratio • Optional English subtitles • A lengthy booklet with writing about the film by Arthur Mas, Andy Rector, Serge Daney, and Caroline Champetier; writing from the original press-book by Jacques Rivette, and Jean Narboni; rare archival imagery; and more



The Masters of Cinema Series
mastersofcinema.org

Both available from:

amazon.co.uk



Gods and monsters

Only God Forgives reunites director Nicolas Winding Refn with Ryan Gosling, but it's more than just a rehash of *Drive*, says **Kim Newman**. PLUS **Hannah McGill** on the star's unique appeal

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The essay film

To coincide with a major season at London's BFI Southbank, *S&S* explores the characteristics that have come to define the genre and looks in detail at a dozen influential milestone essay films, from Jean Vigo to Chris Marker. By **Andrew Tracy**, **Geoff Andrew**, **Nick Bradshaw**, **Chris Darke**, **Sophie Mayer**, **Catherine McGahan**, **Olaf Möller**, **Nina Power**, **Ginette Vincendeau** and **Sergio Wolf**





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The Times



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The Daily Express



"Powerfully, simply moving"

The Financial Times



Independent on Sunday



Total Film



Little White Lies

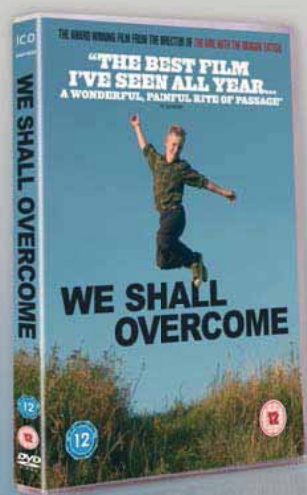


"Epic, whole and truly memorable"

The Sunday Times

"A poetic, psychedelic rhapsody"

Sight and Sound



"A heartwarmer"

The Independent

"The best film I've seen all year... a wonderful, and painful, rite of passage"

The Guardian

"Enjoyably rousing... cinematographer Lars Vestergaard works miracles"

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(incorporating Monthly Film Bulletin)
Published monthly by the BFI

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Volume 23 Issue 8 (NS)
ISSN 0037-4806 USPS 496-040

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COVER

Frances Ha

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CURZON

FILM WORLD



BEWARE OF MR. BAKER

A legendary, era-defining drummer who played with Cream, Blind Faith, Fela Kuti and many other groups, the mad, bad Ginger Baker is as well known for his debauched off-stage antics as he is for his groundbreaking musicianship. Following in the tradition of music documentaries like Searching for Sugar Man, Jay Bulger's award-winning and frequently hilarious portrait of a troubled genius is an insightful, detailed and boldly original film, featuring contributions from Carlos Santana, Stewart Copeland and Lars Ulrich, as well as Baker's band members Eric Clapton and Jack Bruce.

ON DVD, BLU-RAY
& ON DEMAND 22 JULY

A LATE QUARTET

The Fugue Quartet has performed together for over 25 years, attracting worldwide acclaim. But when one member admits that time may have finally caught up with him the group finds itself faced with an uncertain future of shifting dynamics and strained relationships, echoed by the complexities of their swansong piece – Beethoven's notoriously difficult String Quartet No. 14. An astute, poignant and uplifting drama, Yaron Zilberman's sensitive depiction of the New York music scene elicits career-best performances from a stunning ensemble cast including Christopher Walken, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Catherine Keener and Imogen Poots.



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Cornag Specialist

Tel: 01895 433800

Bookshop distribution

Central Books

Tel: 020 8986 4854

Sight & Sound (ISSN 0037-4806)

is published monthly by British Film Institute, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN and distributed in the USA by Mail Right Int., 1637 Stelton Road B4, Piscataway, NJ 08854.

Periodicals Postage Paid at Piscataway, NJ and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Sight and Sound c/o Mail Right International Inc, 1637 Stelton Road B4, Piscataway NJ 08854.

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Annual subscription rates:

UK £45, Eire and ROW \$68

£10 discount for BFI members



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The BFI is a charity, (registration number 287780), registered at 21 Stephen St, London, W1T 1LN



Editorial Nick James



CHILDREN OF THE EVOLUTION

Since at least a decade before this century began, millennial angst – fed by rapid technological change – has haunted the moving image. So much so that cinephiles have got used to ignoring the pulse of ‘cinema is dead’ mantras; in fact they tend to feel that, if what we hold dear is being undermined from several quarters, technology itself offers new ways to hold the line of cinema’s history of quality while at the same time developing an exciting future.

At the basic level, for instance, if the video/DVD sales that have long been the bedrock of financial viability for the industry are falling to the point where the profit margins of specialist titles are now under extreme pressure, the hope is that a combination of new social-media strategies, multi-platform distribution approaches and paid-for download will eventually supplant that vital revenue stream. Or take the Spielberg/Lucas postulation that a run of failed blockbusters would so disastrously distort Hollywood economics that, the larger the budget of a film, the more you’d have to pay at the box office. Those of us who think of blockbusters mainly as an aesthetic and cultural bottleneck restricting cinema’s potential as an artform might welcome such an event as our own Arab Spring. Then, hopefully, cinema audiences would begin again to enjoy a plenitude of different sorts of film.

Of course, by using words like ‘hopefully’ I’ve indicated a degree of wish-fulfilment. But I’m not about to close my fist on that wish, even if economic woes make it harder than ever to imagine these ideas coming to fruition any time soon. Having just been at the Edinburgh International Film Festival, where a worldwide variety of ‘small’ films is the daily fare, I’ve seen how much of international cinema seems to be holding on by its fingernails (hoping the European-US trade talks don’t kill off European cinema altogether) – as well as the various ways in which cinema is transmuting itself to be in better shape to deal with new realities.

One area where cinema is coming to a better understanding of itself in this new context is the essay film – which just so happens to be a major theme of this issue (see Deep Focus, p.44). Two out of the three films currently rattling around in my head are examples of this elusive form: the Sophie Fiennes/Slavoj Žižek collaboration *The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology* and Mark Cousins’s *A Story of Children and*

As melded together in my imagination, these films give the impression that if the future of cinema is changing even faster than we’re used to, then we’re all virtual children



Film. The third – non-essay – film is Alex Gibney’s more straightforward documentary *We Steal Secrets: The Story of WikiLeaks*. These films are all too complex to describe in detail here, so I’m just going to lay out the very plain conclusions I’m drawing from each.

Whatever your view of Gibney’s skeptical conclusions about Julian Assange, *We Steal Secrets* does amply demonstrate that very few people (if any) understand the full potentialities of the internet, how wide-ranging and uncontrollable those potentialities are – or how naive, confused and deluded the virtual world makes many of those who think they can understand it. *The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology* uses a bunch of great movie clips to further emphasise our drift state by showing that trying to expose or break with the ideology of consumption hurts, and that there is no ‘Big Other’ on whose shoulders we can cry about it. *A Story of Children and Film*, by pulling together so many images of the fortitude of children, extols the potential for cinema to make poetic leaps while yet remaining true to filmed reality.

As melded together in my imagination, these films give the impression that if the future of cinema is changing even faster than we’re used to, then we’re all virtual children, and maybe it’s the childlike virtues – stubbornness as much as open-mindedness – that may prove the most useful in dealing with it. For if the speed of change is increasing yet again, we will constantly be told that only people at the forefront of those technological changes can really comment on them.

I would like to refute that idea by quoting the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben: “Those who coincide too well with the epoch, those who are perfectly tied to it in every respect, are not contemporaries precisely because they do not manage to see it... The ones who can call themselves contemporaries are only those who do not allow themselves to be blinded.” ☺

IN THE FRAME

MOVIES ON THE BOX



Talking shop: BBC2's *Late Night Line-Up* with Joan Bakewell offered a platform to discuss film from 1964

A new BFI Southbank season explores the long and sometimes troubled history of television's treatment of film

By Danny Leigh

In the dank summer of 1956, British TV viewers could at least enjoy a taste of glamour with the BBC's new film show *Picture Parade*. As the likes of Joan Crawford waited to be interviewed, the opening titles panned across a modish set where a young secretary sat uncertain of purpose. Finally the orchestral theme swelled to a crescendo and an onscreen caption announced the programme was "Presented with the Co-operation of the Film Industry".

This convivial rictus grin was no accident. Aware of film business dislike for its upstart rival, producer Cecil Madden announced his show would mark a new accord between the two. If that seemed bold, it also felt far-sighted – with an obvious kinship beyond the jostling, British TV could surely find room for great programmes about cinema. And in the 57 years since, sometimes it has. Just as often, though, relations have been testy and half-hearted, as if two teenage cousins had been seated together at a family wedding, then spent the whole event avoiding eye contact.

A little of everything can shortly be seen in the BFI Southbank season 'Television Looks at Film', with screenings devoted to magazine shows, interviews and review programmes, and a panel discussion unpicking the genre. Milestones in a long, odd history abound: watch *Picture Parade* now and, for all the Brylcreem and received pronunciation, the fundamentals of film-on-TV are recognisably the same, a frothy confection of clips and stars. Yet the story is also one of quick cancellations and short memories, the crowded graveyard of old shows witness to a nagging unease about how to handle film at all.

The nervous shuffling of personnel in front of the camera tells its own story. Countless critics have had their moment (in 2010 I joined their number as co-host of the BBC's durable *Film* programme, blinking in the lights after many years writing for *Sight & Sound*, among others). But the conch has also been passed to

Scalarama

The Scala Forever team returns with a month-long UK-wide season in September. The full list of venues is announced on scalarama.com on 29 July. Titles include the 1963 sci-fi film 'Ikarie XB-1' (right) and 1984's 'Sleepwalker', presented in association with the BFI's Flipside label.



Out 1

The ultimate badge of honour for the committed cinephile, Jacques Rivette's 1971 film runs 12 hours 40 minutes. Screenings are so rare that when the BFI showed the film in 2006, people travelled from the US to see it. But the German DVD label Absolut Medien has now released the film with English subtitles. It's available from www.absolutmedien.de



ON OUR
RADAR



Critical condition: Barry Norman wryly held the middle ground on the BBC's durable *Film* programme

established TV faces, ersatz video-shop staff, all-purpose arts pundits – and, occasionally, the public. It sometimes seems as if the only people British TV hasn't asked to talk film are filmmakers. Rarely have we had a match for France's *Cinéastes de notre temps*, the 60s series that allowed directors to make programmes about each other; Jacques Rivette documented Jean Renoir and, in a more recent incarnation, Rafi Pitts pursued Abel Ferrara for a portrait at once ramshackle and pinpoint-precise.

Auteur theory was just a footnote for British TV, as befits a medium where everything we see is filtered through a mesh of executives. Much of it is also expressed in a perky visual language familiar from TV documentaries – “look at this, look at that, look at me” – that rarely benefits from comparison with cinema. Tellingly, the glorious panorama of Mark Cousins's 15-part *The Story of Film: An Odyssey* (Channel 4, 2011) was made to look unlike television.

Before Cousins, the thought of learning about movies through TV often brought to mind the joke about asking for directions in the countryside: “I wouldn't start from here.” Yet some eras got it right. From the 70s to the 90s, Barry Norman wryly held the middle ground on the BBC's *Film* programme but more adventurous coverage was scheduled elsewhere – the chewy *Moving Pictures*, Cousins's quizzical *Scene by Scene*, and *Moviedrome*, whose introductions of cult favourites

dominate memories of the Edenic recent past.

Edens, of course, tend to end up lost. In the last decade, film on TV has dwindled to a nub, the major channels never less interested. The reasons for that probably range from the practical (anxiety about the potential cost of using film clips) to the cultural (arts programming as remit-meeting chore, the medium's equivalent of bagging the recycling).

But maybe film lovers share the blame too. If the internet has meant glimpses of coming attractions no longer thrill like they did in 1956, the last decade has also seen cinema culture fractured, with the dominant strain of purse-lipped fanboyism giving film the air of a bedroom hobby. And once film is merely a niche then, with unremarkable ratings and the lack of a telegenic TV figurehead like science's Brian Cox, commissioners will always favour the trusted appeal of royal palaces and Sunday-night travelogues.

Perhaps the indifference is mutual now. We're sometimes told cinephiles don't watch TV about film anymore. If so, then as a medium still able to bring millions together, it's hard not to be saddened by the unmade possibilities – the small-screen cinematheque we never got to see, the ghost of Cecil Madden's vision. **S**

i **The season 'Broadcasting the Arts: Television Looks at Film' runs at BFI Southbank, London until 31 July**

ANATOMY OF A MOVIE FRANCES HA

22% *Annie Hall* (1977)

19% *The Green Ray* (1986)

13% *Bande à part* (1964)

11% *Une femme est une femme* (1961)

9% *Girls* (2012)

9% *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986)

6% *It Should Happen to You* (1954)

5% *Mauvais sang* (1986)

4% *My Girlfriend's Boyfriend* (1987)

2% *Happy-Go-Lucky* (2008)



QUOTE OF THE MONTH FRANÇOIS TRUFFAUT

“The film of tomorrow will not be directed by civil servants of the camera, but by artists... The film of tomorrow will resemble the person who made it, and the number of spectators will be proportional to the number of friends the director has. The film of tomorrow will be an act of love.”

From *Arts*, 15 May 1957. As excerpted in *Truffaut: A Biography* by Antoine De Baecque and Serge Toubiana



Top of the Lake

Jane Campion plays with the clichés of the police-procedural in her enigmatic six-part TV drama, which stars Elisabeth Moss (right) as a detective investigating the disappearance of a 12-year-old girl in a small town in New Zealand. It premieres on BBC Two in July.



A London Trilogy

A treat for amateur psychogeographers or anybody interested in the changing face of London, this BFI DVD collects the three films Saint Etienne have made with filmmaker Paul Kelly: 'Finisterre' (right), 'What Have You Done Today Mervyn Day' and 'This Is Tomorrow', along with various other shorts. It's out on 15 July.



Anand Patwardhan

The Indian director's films inaugurated the country's independent documentary movement in the 1970s, but have rarely been screened in the UK. The retrospective 'A Cinema of Songs and People' is a chance to catch such titles as 'Bombay: Our City' (right). Tate Modern, 12-28 July.



RINGING THE CHANGES

More than mere props and status signifiers, mobile phones have altered the possibilities of film narrative



By Hannah McGill

The capacity of mobile-communication devices to scupper plots is oft observed, and examples are not hard to cite.

A timely text would undo Romeo and Juliet's final chain of disasters, save on a powerful lot of confusion between Tess Durbeyfield and Angel Clare, and make it a little harder for *Fight Club's* narrator not to notice his intimate connection to Tyler Durden. Every siege plot is screwed by the addition of a working mobile, and every last-minute dash to the airport or meet-up on the Empire State Building drained of its desperate romance. So it is that horror films now habitually have to include a moment making the point that no one can get a signal in that isolated cabin; some films, the better to amp up the timeless romance, just pretend like mobile phones don't exist. Look at Reese

Witherspoon and Matthew McConaughey's characters in *Mud* (2012), vaguely indicating their whereabouts to one another via letters—letters!—hand-delivered by messenger boys.

And yet we all know that ownership of a mobile phone doesn't magically cleanse life of all logistical problems. Sudden signal death happens, after all, even without a mad axeman on your trail; messages mysteriously decline to reach their marks; dual-band phones become functionless slabs in tri-band territories; and how often does a charger stay stuck in a hotel power point long after its owner has blithely departed, phone battery dwindling all the while?

Older readers may recall that in the case of the latter oversight, chargers used to be far harder to replace. Phone companies seemed to have made it deliberately hard: no one had a spare and universal ones were like gold dust. That's why the desperate situation that kicks off Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne's *The Child* (2005)—new mother Sonia (Déborah François) banging on a door in search of her misplaced *chargeur de portable*—felt so instantly vivid, contemporary and relatable. This wasn't a world in which star-crossed lovers sent one another on quirky handmade treasure hunts or



Clueless

happened to coincide in the shadow of potent landmarks but one in which your phone could go dead and it could screw your day. And Sonia was representative of a generation for whom a mobile phone was no longer the ostentatious emblem of conspicuous consumption it represented in its earliest screen incarnations (brick-sized in 1987's *Lethal Weapon* and *Wall Street*; shorthand for a character being self-absorbed, work-obsessed or privileged for a good decade thereafter). Not the state-of-the-art product placement opportunity it has since



A tough call: Bruno (Jérémy Renier) uses his mobile to make plans to sell his newborn to a shady adoption service in *The Child*



Wall Street

become in tech-heavy franchises like the James Bond series, for her it was a simple necessity – an extension of one's speaking and moving self. Sonia is a drifter with no permanent address but, rather than rendering mobile communication an unattainable luxury, this makes it all the more crucial. In terms of the symbolic functioning of the mobile phone on screen, there's a full generational shift between the spoilt brats of *Clueless* (1995) flaunting their over-privilege by chatting on cellphones even as they pass each other in the school

The Dardennes position the tinny ring of the mobile as an increasingly malignant and painful intrusion in 'The Child'

halls and *The Child's* similarly-aged characters holding their hardscrabble lives together with the same devices. Sonia's is a hand-to-mouth existence enabled by a hand-to-mouth device.

She needs to charge her phone in order to find her boyfriend Bruno (J  r  mie Renier), and introduce him to the newborn he has fathered. Ostensibly the sort of charismatic, infuriating, unscrupulous rogue to whom most of us have given too much leeway at one time or another, Bruno turns out to be rather more dangerous than most of his breed: his restless eye for a quick buck soon sees him arrange behind Sonia's back the sale of their child to a shady adoption service. The whole deal is set up on his mobile, the tinny ring of which the Dardennes position as an increasingly malignant and painful intrusion, first because it indicates that his contact is finalising plans to acquire the baby, then because it means Sonia is closing in on the revelation that will devastate her. Just as *The Child* reverses expectations by lending the tension of a thriller to what presents as a slow social-realist drama, so it confounds the new received wisdom that the mobile is somehow an anti-cinematic entity by having Sonia and Bruno's fates be so predicated not on that horror-movie absence of connection but on its ready availability. The directors may be sixtyish but they point the way here for a coming generation of filmmakers who won't have to think how to excuse the presence or arrange the absence of mobile phones in their scripts, having never known a life without them.  

THE FIVE KEY...

WILLIAM WYLER FILMS

The rerelease of *Roman Holiday* offers an apt occasion to say ciao to one of Hollywood's most meticulous craftsmen



By Philip Kemp

Perfectionist, '90-take' Wyler (left) spared neither himself nor his actors. "For God's sake, man, what do you want?" exploded

Laurence Olivier after the 20th "again, please". Wyler (smiling sadly): "I want you to be better." Was it all worth it? What some saw as "a style of great purity, directness and warmth" (James Agee) others dismissed as "a hollow, grand manner" (David Thomson). But some riveting scenes, and some classic performances, emerged from Wyler's soft-spoken tyranny.



2 The Letter (1940)

Wyler and Bette Davis fought endlessly, but he still managed to force some of her best performances out of her. This was never more true than in this steamy Somerset Maugham adaptation, with Davis superbly controlled as the adulterous, murderous wife of a British planter in Malaya.



4 The Best Years of Our Lives (1946)

Having been injured himself while flying with combat missions for his documentary *Thunderbolt*, Wyler brought personal experience to his account of three veterans trying to readjust to post-war civilian life. The Wyler-Toland style – long takes, intricate compositions in depth – reaches its apogee.



1 Dead End (1937)

Humphrey Bogart plays a mobster snarling his way towards death in this New York-set (though studio-shot) crime melodrama, which launched the Dead End Kids on their extensive career of screen delinquency. Gregg Toland's camera prowls restlessly around the huge, elaborate set.



3 Mrs. Miniver (1942)

OK, its Hollywoodised depiction of a rose-garden England is hopelessly phony and sentimental. But Wyler's hurrah for the British war effort, with Greer Garson keeping the home fires burning, still exerts surprising emotional impact. Much admired by Roosevelt – and Joseph Goebbels.



5 Roman Holiday (1953)

A rare comedy in Wyler's output, this brought Audrey Hepburn to stardom. Her princess, on a state visit to Rome, briefly escapes the cage of protocol with Gregory Peck's American reporter and his scooter. A fairytale – but one that resists the temptation of an inanelly happy ending.

ELIAS QUEREJETA (1934-2013)

The Basque producer helped transform an impoverished film industry in Spain, creating some of its most controversial movies

By Tom Whittaker

To speak of the Basque producer Elías Querejeta is to speak of the history of modern Spanish film. From the early 1960s until his death at the age of 78 in June, Querejeta oversaw the production of some of the most historically significant and controversial films ever to be made in Spain. From the haunting allegories of life under Franco, Víctor Erice's *The Spirit of the Beehive* (1973) and Carlos Saura's *Cría cuervos* (1975) to the gritty post-industrial realism of Fernando León's *Mondays in the Sun* (*Los lunes al sol*, 2002), his films frequently met with acclaim from domestic critics and film festivals alike. Through grit and passion, Querejeta shone a light on Spanish film: he transformed and revived an impoverished film industry and carved out an important space for auteurist cinema and social realism in Spain.

Shambolically dishevelled and slight of frame, his physical appearance gave few hints that he was a manager of exceptional tenacity and steely control. More a creator than a producer, Querejeta's method of production was unique. He obsessively kept a hand in every aspect of the artistic filmmaking process, gaining him the status of an artisanal producer – or a consummate “producer without a cigar” as a journalist once put it. A producer-auteur, his authorial vision and tight-knit team of collaborators not only dramatically improved the technical quality of Spanish film but helped in turn to nurture and promote some of the most visually distinctive directors to have emerged from Spain: Saura, Erice, León and Montxo Armendáriz.

Born in 1934 in rural Hernani, Querejeta was initially more seduced by football than cinema. By the age of 18 he was a striker for first-division Real Sociedad, the Donostia/San Sebastián team that in, the 1940s, had also boasted the famous sculptor Eduardo Chillida in its squad. In 1963 he left football to head to Madrid where his close friend, the fledgling director Antonio Eceiza, was studying at the state-run film school. Querejeta would pore over Eceiza's class notes by night, by day working to set up his own production company and channelling the speed and agility for which he was renowned on the pitch into finding the very best directors and technicians with whom to work. By 1965, the *familia Querejeta* was in place: director of photography Luis Cuadrado, who became known for his painterly chiaroscuro images; editor Pablo G. del Amo, who had been previously imprisoned for his communist politics; composer Luis de Pablo, who was feted for his serialist, avant-garde compositions; and costume designer Maiki Marín, to whom Querejeta was married.

Right from these early years, Querejeta possessed a canny knack for exploiting the manifold contradictions and loopholes of the Franco regime (1939-1975). Biting the



‘Producer without a cigar’: Querejeta was uncompromising in his belief in the humanity of cinema


proverbial hand that fed him, he used state subsidies to produce films that would mount scathing critiques of Francoist ideology. For instance, his 1973 production *Cousin Angelica* (*La prima Angélica*) – directed by Saura – contained a scene in which a wounded Falangist soldier is depicted with his right arm in a cast, caught in a permanent fascist salute. Before the authorities could react, the film had been accepted as the official Spanish entry at Cannes that year. It was astonishing that this film had been made at all, given that Spanish cinema was subject to the strictures of censorship until 1977. As a reaction, Querejeta and his in-house team developed a highly opaque visual language, in which political contestation was cryptically articulated through *mise en scène* rather than dialogue, an approach that often evaded the literal-minded censors.

After Spain's transition to democracy, Querejeta's commitment to exposing social injustice became all the more pronounced, with his struggle now directed against Spain's embrace of neoliberal capitalism. Films such as Saura's *Deprisa, deprisa* (*Hurry, Hurry*, 1980), Armendáriz's *Las cartas de Alou* (*Letters from Alou*, 1990) and *Mondays in the Sun* captured the social reality of urban Spain from the geographical perspective of the dispossessed. Indeed, his filmmaking was always informed

His films were always informed by a moral responsibility to expose and educate, a mirror in which Spain could see itself

by a moral responsibility to expose and educate, a mirror in which Spain could see the true conditions of its existence. Querejeta's in-house team developed several realist techniques, from deep-focus cinematography to direct sound (Querejeta and Saura's 1970s film *The Garden of Delights* was the first Spanish film not to use post-synchronised sound). In spite of working with a number of directors, many of his films were unified by a spatial realism whereby landscape was often a subject rather than a setting. In later years, he supported several hard-hitting documentaries such as *Winter in Baghdad* (Javier Corcuera, 2005) and *La espalda del mundo* (Corcuera, 2000), as well as the more gentle dramas by his daughter, Gracia Querejeta, such as *Héctor* (2004) and *Siete mesas de billar francés* (2007).

He co-wrote more than 20 of the screenplays he produced and wielded a heavy influence on the formal shape of his films, from the choice of filmstock and editing techniques to the casting and soundtrack. His interventions (or “meddlings” as Armendáriz put it) also led to spectacular collisions with his contributors: Cuadrado reportedly held him by his collar and called him a “witch” at the screening of *The Spirit of the Beehive*, while a German-Spanish co-production with Wim Wenders ended with the director stating that he would rather work with a fascist who left his negatives alone.

But if Querejeta earned a reputation as an autocrat, this was also a man who, against all odds, was uncompromising in his belief in the humanity of cinema. Film for Querejeta was a transformative force: one that both exposed and resisted, and that was an engine for social good. 



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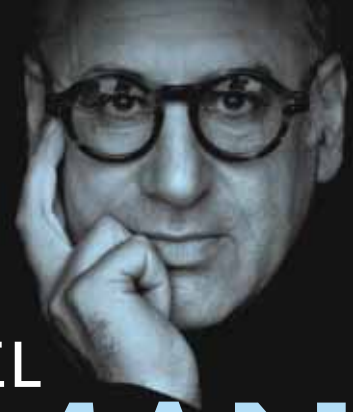
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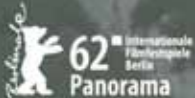
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A PLACE IN THE SUN

The lure of flesh on screen, of sunlit romance and the open road, point to the unexpected affinity between cinema and summer



By Mark Cousins

I've just spent today, the longest day of the year, at the Edinburgh International Film Festival, cycling in hot sun between cinemas

to see movies. It was so bright today that when I got inside the movie theatres, it took my eyes a while to become accustomed to the dark. The afterimage of the sunlit cityscape still ghosted as I sat down and waited for the films to begin. I was reminded of the great animator Norman McLaren's *Flicker Film*, which is nothing but darkness intercut with flashes of white, but in which people swear they see flowers, trees etc.

At first thought, you could say there's something un-summery about moviegoing, at least in un-summery places like Scotland. Whereas in many hot countries, box-office takings increased when air conditioning was invented, as people wanted to get out of the heat of the day, here and in many northern climes, people want to get into the heat of the day, so the cinemas suffer. Moviegoing is something you do when it's not summer.

Yet when I think of the films that give me the most pleasure, I realise that some of the key ones are about summer. Take Ingmar Bergman's *Summer with Monika* (1952), for example. The scene in which Harriet Andersson runs naked into the sea has an obvious erotic appeal but, beyond that, to think of it is to be reminded of the fact that movies are great at bodies, at flesh. That sweaty summer film *Body Heat* (1981) even tells us so in its title. Of course, fashion and costume are one of the key expressive things in the movies, but so is the lack of them, just as it is in painting. Flesh gives a film an extra touchability and texture, what the theorists call the haptic, hence Monroe and Maciste.

Another summer film I love, David Lean's *Summer Madness* (1955), has no such flesh on display but its pleasures also tell us something about the adjacent pleasures of the movies. Maybe I like it so much because Katharine Hepburn is on holiday in it; maybe it's because she's taking risks with her heart – her flirtations while on holiday – and maybe summer is a time when we take such risks.

Movies, of course, are good at experimenting with matters of the heart and romance. Lean's film probably isn't often compared to Alfonso Cuarón's *Y tu mamá también* (2001), in which two lads and an older woman drive in search of an ideal beach, but it too is a summer-holiday film about risky flirtations and how romance seems to photosynthesise the sun, turning its blinding light into desire. *Y tu mamá también* is also a road movie; to say this is to realise that there's a lot of movement in summer films. They are more likely to be about journeys, the open road, than stay-at-home-and-bunker-down



Heat and dust: Jacques Tati's great summer film *M. Hulot's Holiday*

winter movies. In this way too, summer and cinema are siblings. Summer movies allow us to holiday away from our own lives. To say this, I think, inches us closer to the unexpected affinity between movies and summer.

We get closer still when we consider Jacques Tati's great summer film *M. Hulot's Holiday* (1953). It isn't a road movie, but it's full of summer objects, the things of everyday life which become bits of comic business: the ice-cream machine, the pot of paint, the boat that looks like a shark. Like Chaplin, Tati was great at objects and, of course, so are the movies. The extraordinary Iranian films of the last generation are often about a quest for an object or things – a jar, goldfish, a bag of rice, a carpet, a red boot, etc. Tati's summer film reminds us of the centrality of objects to the movies; most film scripts would be improved if they added one.

Bodies, romantic experiments, journeys, objects: the stuff of summer and of cinema. We

To sit in the dark and look up at the silver screen is a bit like sitting in winter and looking at summer



Y tu mamá también

notice another connection between the two when we think of the movie I saw most in my teens, *Grease* (1978). I loved its songs and the camaraderie but also I loved the fact that it kept referring to a summer – and its nights – that had already happened. We glimpse the beach on which John and Olivia got up to whatever they got up to but now, back in Rydell High, they are re-fettered, conforming to their tribes once more. Their summer together was a kind of paradise lost that you can feel throughout the movie, the memory of which is so strong that it makes them reverse the polarity of their tribal allegiances to such an extent that he dons a cardy and she goes for borderline fetish, skin-tight trousers. Summer – and the memory of it, its afterimage – can do that to you. Katharine Hepburn's Venice is a paradise lost too, as is the summer with Monika. Cinema is good at such longing for something that's no longer there or, to put that more strongly, it is longing for something that's no longer there.

As I sat in the cinemas today, the afterimage of the sunshine was, of course, replaced by a luminosity that was far more *puissant* – that of the films themselves. It seems obvious to say this, but to sit in the dark and look up at the silver screen is a bit like sitting in winter and looking at summer, like sitting in a contained, cosy place and looking out into an expanded one – a beach, a desert. This applies to some degree, I think, even to the night-time worlds of film noir.

Take this thought to the end of the line and you begin to think of the movies, and the flicker of the projected image, as a kind of heat shimmer, a mirage. Could this be why I like African films so much? Could it be why, when I first saw Souleymane Cissé's *Yeelen* (*Brightness*, 1987) it struck me as some kind of definition of the movies, just as Hank Quinlan was some kind of man? Summer light blinds, but it also reveals, just like cinema. ☺

DEVELOPMENT TALE

TRAP FOR CINDERELLA



Grudge match: Alexandra Roach in *Trap for Cinderella*, which focuses on a young woman with amnesia struggling to establish her true identity

Iain Softley's adaptation of a French thriller languished for 12 years after a trio of screenwriters failed to give him what he wanted

By Charles Gant

When director Iain Softley originally optioned the 1962 Sébastien Japrisot novel *Trap for Cinderella* (*Piège pour Cendrillon*), his career was at a high point. His latest film *The Wings of the Dove* (1997) had scored four Oscar nominations, and his company had a sweet deal with Film4, which at the time was an ambitiously funded entity with its own distribution arm.

But Softley was not necessarily in a tearing hurry to make the film. In the first place, *Trap* was just one of several projects he was developing with Film4. And second, burgeoning interest from Hollywood (where Softley's directing gigs included the 2001 Kevin Spacey starrer *K-pax*) was keeping him pretty busy. That said, he probably didn't anticipate that it would be 12 years before cameras would start rolling on the film, after three screenwriters tried and failed to adapt the Gallic melodrama.

Producer Dixie Linder (*The War Zone*) vividly remembers when she was first invited to join

the film: she read the book on the plane to Sydney to celebrate the millennium. Set at the time of its writing, the early 1960s, in Paris and the South of France, the mystery focuses on the intense friendship between two young women, one of whom wakes with amnesia, burns and major plastic surgery after a house fire.

Softley, a big fan of the 1983 Isabelle Adjani film *One Deadly Summer*, likewise adapted from a Japrisot novel, travelled to Vichy, France to meet the man in person and secure an option. The author, who died in 2003, revealed to him that Warners had previously optioned *Trap* for Stanley Kubrick, but it came to naught. (The book was previously filmed in France in 1965.)

With development funding from Film4, two writers were hired in succession to write the screenplay. (These names are not in the public domain, but the film's credits include thanks to possible contenders Allan Scott [*Don't Look Now*, *The Witches*], Hossein Amini [*The Wings of the Dove*, *Drive*] and Peter Berry [*The Luzhin Defence*].) Then Film4 was radically reinvented in 2002, its budget drastically reduced and its distribution arm closed, with the exit of the key executives who had shepherded the project, Paul Webster and Elinor Day. With the option on the book expiring, Softley and Linder looked to US company Odd Lot, who now removed the

ticking-clock element by purchasing the book outright and commissioning a new screenplay from Chris Gerolmo (*Mississippi Burning*).

Comments Linder: "It was a very difficult book to adapt. It's a fantastic read, it's a real thriller page-turner, but when you came to adapt it, it was quite hard." Softley, who ended up adapting the book himself, adds: "I don't want this to be interpreted as a criticism of other people. I would be responsible as much as anyone for not having found the story that I wanted to tell at that point. It was in the process of trying to be rigorous about that with myself, trying to analyse what it was that had a hook in me, that I was then able to come up with a [solution]."

Early screenplay attempts followed the contours of the source material, locating the action in Paris and the South of France, with the assumption that this would be a French co-production. "Weirdly, it wasn't a natural one for the French market," says Linder. "Japrisot is a very revered writer over there. Maybe there was an issue about an Englishman making a French film."

Softley went through contortions justifying why his principal characters were conversing in English while living in France, before eventually switching the Paris-set scenes to London, placing the beautiful, carefree Micky at

the heart of Hoxton's fashion and club scene.

Linder and Softley parted ways with Odd Lot, which had budgeted the film at an ambitious \$23 million. "The higher the budget, the fewer the actors you can greenlight the film with," explains the director. "And those people, everybody's after, and it's a nightmare trying to get a slot. We realised that in all ways it was better to bring the budget down as low as we could."

At one point Imogen Poots and Felicity Jones were cast in the lead roles, although when cameras eventually rolled in 2011, the names switched to Tuppence Middleton and Alexandra Roach, both making their debuts as lead actors.

"We had different people attached," says Linder. "We became out of synch slightly with the cast: we either had someone who was just about to break but the financiers were nervous, and then of course they would break and we lost them. We had a lot of casting issues going on around that."

With the budget now reconfigured to a more realistic level, *Trap* received enthusiastic encouragement from the UK Film Council's Premier Fund, led by Sally Caplan. Support continued from Tanya Seghatchian when she took over the UKFC's newly merged filmmaking division in February 2010. By this time, Robert Jones (*Run Fatboy Run*) had boarded to give the producer team additional heft, having previously attempted to work with Softley on an adaptation of the Stephen Gallagher novel *The Boat House*. Now a deal was put in place

We did the film using every single favour and resource. I had to find the simple way to do everything, with no room for manoeuvre

with film financier Prescience, post-production company LipSync, sales agency Ealing Metro and distributor Lionsgate UK. Shooting began in April 2011, the same month that the British Film Institute officially absorbed most of the functions of the now-abolished UKFC.

In the 12 years Softley and Linder worked on *Trap for Cinderella*, the director made three films in the US – *K-pax*, *The Skeleton Key* and *Inkheart* – and mounted a stage version of his debut feature *Backbeat*. Linder busied herself with other productions, also giving birth to two children. Softley reveals that, with a production spend of £2.5 million (plus deferrals), *Trap* is the lowest-budget film of his 20-year career, and with just five-and-a-half weeks to shoot, certainly his tightest.

"We did it using every single favour and resource," he says. "I had to find the simple version of doing everything. There was no room for manoeuvre. It is a kind of risky way of going, particularly on a film that has a certain degree of visual effects and special effects, and underwater shooting. I was having to pare down the script: at one point there was a drowning at sea, which came out. I think that in a lot of cases, these things improve the story by streamlining it. You cut it down to its essentials." ❦

i *Trap for Cinderella* is released in the UK on 12 July and is reviewed on page 88

THE NUMBERS BEHIND THE CANDELABRA

By Charles Gant

For any film distributor apt to be intimidated, Steven Soderbergh's *Behind the Candelabra* certainly offered its share of challenges. The director's well-publicised exit from moviemaking drew extra attention to the film's status as a made-for-TV HBO title. Pianist Liberace didn't seem to offer an equivalent fanbase to the subjects of previous hit music biopics, since he's not a significant recording artist, his renown resting on performances that ended with his death 26 years ago. And as a gay icon, his feminised appearance – make-up, wigs, jewellery, fur coats – and closeted lifestyle push him to the margins both politically and aesthetically.

For UK distributor eOne, such concerns were outweighed by the film's potential. "We had a movie directed by a world-class filmmaker, from an esteemed producer, with two big movie stars in it," says boss Alex Hamilton. "We recognised the younger audience wouldn't be aware of Liberace, but that wouldn't necessarily put them off because it is about a performer at the height of fame, and that story is appealing whether it's *A Star Is Born* or *Dreamgirls*. We tended to focus on the fame, the glamour, the extravagance of his lifestyle and his performing style."

As for Liberace's shortcomings as a role model, says Hamilton, "Forty years ago the mainstream audience who went to see Liberace perform in Las Vegas didn't know he was a gay performer, and yet from our perspective, how could they not know? It all adds to the fascination."

Having originally tried to secure UK rights when the production was set to be a bigger-budgeted US theatrical release, eOne retained its interest after the HBO rescue. Piracy was a concern for Hamilton – "Because it's been on TV, there's going to be a pirate file pretty darn quick" – but less so the small-screen stigma. "Cannes was a huge fillip for that. If it's presented at the Cannes Film Festival, what greater endorsement as a film can there be?"



Rich pickings: *Behind the Candelabra*

Initially, eOne was set to release on 14 June, as a provocative piece of counter-programming to *Man of Steel*. But as the date approached, nerves faltered. A switch to 7 June proved a wise move, since the new date put *Candelabra* against under-performing Will Smith title *After Earth*, and positioned it as the lead film of the week. Initially opening on a relatively tight 131 screens, *Candelabra* achieved the highest screen average in the market over the first seven days, grossing more than £1 million. The film then expanded in weeks two and three, reaching £2.44 million at press time. "We think we'll get to maybe £3.5 million now, which is great," says Hamilton. "It's nice when films are a bit against the odds, but I never thought it was such a long shot in the first place. I always thought the film would appeal." ❦

MUSIC BIOPICS AT UK BOX OFFICE

Film	Year	Gross
Walk the Line	2006	£10,368,223
What's Love Got to Do with It	1993	£3,795,048
The Doors	1991	£2,885,767
Behind the Candelabra	2013	£2,444,433*
Ray	2005	£2,258,658
Backbeat	1993	£1,870,001
La Vie en rose	2007	£1,711,225
Nowhere Boy	2009	£1,326,761
La Bamba	1986	£1,286,615
Control	2007	£1,214,948

*gross after 17 days

A PUBLIC INQUIRY

BFI FILM FUND INSIGHTS

By hosting a public pitching event for those looking for documentary funding we're hoping to mimic the wider audience landscape



By Ben Roberts

This month we at the BFI Film Fund held the first of our twice-yearly pitching sessions for documentary filmmakers, at Doc/Fest

in Sheffield. Pitching isn't an alien concept for doc makers, but this change in our approach to funding met with some resistance nonetheless. Not least because it required the short-listed filmmakers to stand in front of 100 or more of their peers at Sheffield Town Hall, make a five-minute pitch and take another two-brief five minutes of questions and comments from a panel. Short of introducing spinning chairs and a red buzzer, the filmmakers and their projects were exposed in a way that most applicants to the Film Fund are not.

So why do we do it?

We had noticed in the past year that the volume and variety of applications for documentary support was rising, and it became clear that we weren't making clear decisions in the way that we do for fiction material.

This is down to a number of factors: the sheer breadth of themes, subjects and stories being told by documentary filmmakers, the proliferation of documentary work on TV, the rise of the live performance and event broadcasts in cinemas, and our own particular brief to identify those projects that have the potential to play for cinema audiences. The BFI's creative director has grumbled to me in the past that we have a tendency to value cinema on a different (higher?) plane to television, but – for docs at least – I think the distinction is quite clear, and I'll explain why.

My first professional grapple with documentary came at the Toronto International Film Festival during my distribution days with Metrodome, when I was relatively new to acquisitions and skipping gaily between screenings and karaoke bars. In the catalogue of that year's festival, I was intrigued by an image of a boy on a stage, looking troubled and wearing a too-big-for-his-face microphone. The film I discovered was *Spellbound* (2002). As Jeffrey Blitz's doc playfully turned the screws across three classic acts (not least the surprise second-act arrival of a nemesis for our hero), while building layers of themes around nature and nurture, social mobility and the American Dream, I was struck by just how crowd-pleasing it was – while at the same time something of a sociological Trojan horse. I was hooked, we bought the film and it performed very well.

We selected projects that delivered the three As on our wish list: Authorship, Audience and Aesthetic



Documentary dragons: the panel

Fast forward ten years and I think that recent documentaries such as *The Imposter* and *Searching for Sugar Man* have succeeded on the same basis: that is, riding the established narrative arc of their chosen genre (the rug-pulling thriller, the underdog hero) while inviting the audience to engage with their thematic underpinnings. It's these 'genre docs' that seem to be having the strongest pull on cinema audiences. The gonzo superstars – Nick Broomfield, Michael Moore, Morgan Spurlock – have been absent of late, as have those films that deliver a different, transportive pleasure, such as *Etre et avoir* (2002), *The Story of the Weeping Camel* (2003) and Herzog's *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (2010).

Campaigning, educative or issue-driven films still struggle to find significant audiences in the UK – which might say something about our political lethargy in general – even though they have the power to stir the heart and mind in truly fundamental ways. And music films tend to remain a fan focus: Shane Meadows's *Stone Roses: Made of Stone* was a quantifiable recent success, but much of its box office was generated by 'eventising' the premiere for fans.

Applying some sense of this audience landscape to the selection process, for this first pitch session the Film Fund and Doc/Fest teams short-listed eight projects from around 50 applications, with pitching workshops offered to the filmmaking teams ahead of the event. A panel was convened: Lizzie Francke and myself from the BFI, Clare Binns from Picturehouse cinemas and SXSW's Janet Pierson.

The result? For me, a huge success. I'll admit I was a little nervous before the session. Would anyone come? Would the filmmakers resent us for subjecting them to this process? Would we like any of the pitches, having committed ourselves to making at least one decision per event? As it turned out, the pitchers – both new and established filmmakers – gripped a full house with remarkable stories and characters. After the session we were unanimous in our selection of Louise Osmond's *Dark Horse* and Brian Hill's *Thomas Quick: The Making of a Serial Killer* – projects that we felt best delivered the three As on our wish list: Authorship, Audience and Aesthetic.

The next session will take place in London in December. I did wonder, on the drive home, whether we should make all our funding decisions like this. [@bfbfen](#)

IN PRODUCTION

● **Baltasar Kormákur** is to direct a remake of the Filipino crime thriller *On the Job*. The original film, directed by Erik Matti, premiered in this year's Directors' Fortnight at Cannes, where Matti reportedly received numerous remake offers. Tom Cruise and Mark Wahlberg are both rumoured to be interested in starring.

● **Tom Tykwer** is to follow *Cloud Atlas* – the David Mitchell adaptation he co-directed with the Wachowskis – with another German-US co-production, and another adaptation of a fêted author. This time the source material is Dave Eggers's *A Hologram for the King*, about an American businessman living in Saudi Arabia. Tykwer's *Cloud Atlas* star Tom Hanks will take the lead role as well as produce.

● **Christophe Honoré** is to direct his own contemporary interpretation of Ovid's epic poem about the creation and early history of the world, *Metamorphoses*, written around the year 1AD. Honoré's script reportedly involves a teenager who is kidnapped by a man who tells her stories about young people who were transformed into animals after having met him. The stories take the teenager into a mythical world of gods and legends.

● **The Avengers** first screened on British television in 1961, starring Ian Hendry and Patrick Macnee in its first season of 26 episodes. Of those, only two survive in their entirety, the others having been shot primarily on video and wiped when the tapes were reused. But now 12 additional episodes are to be made as audio-only productions, working from the original scripts. The first volume will be available in January 2014.

● **Sam Taylor-Johnson** (aka Sam Taylor-Wood, below) has seen off the competition (rumoured to have included Gus Van Sant and Joe Wright) to bag the director's job on the forthcoming adaptation of E.L. James's mega-selling bonkbuster *Fifty Shades of Grey*. The cast has yet to be decided, though Emma Watson, Ryan Gosling and Alexander Skarsgård have all been rumoured to be in the frame.



● **Spike Jonze** has replaced Samantha Morton with Scarlett Johansson for his next feature *Her* – or more accurately, he has recast Johansson's voice in place of Morton's, for the actress will play the voice of an operating system that writer Joaquin Phoenix falls for. The film is due out this autumn, with a cast including Amy Adams, Olivia Wilde and Rooney Mara.

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THE PRICE OF CENSORSHIP



With unclassified film widely available on the internet, video labels are bridle at the expense of submitting work to the BBFC

By Michael Brooke

Since its post-2000 liberalisation and subsequent light-shedding innovations such as its online database and 'Insight' reports, the British Board of Film Classification has significantly recalibrated its public image. It's still resented by libertarians and social conservatives, for the usual polarised reasons, but the PR strategy to rebrand itself as more a sympathetic but responsible older sibling than a censorious Victorian father has been successful to a degree unimaginable 20 years ago, when the BBFC's former director James Ferman refused *Reservoir Dogs* a video certificate for two years.

The BBFC eschews political games these days: decisions are generally made quickly and outright rejections are sufficiently rare to become news stories in themselves. It's also comparatively unusual that non-pornographic films are cut for the adults-only 18 category, and most such cases potentially fall foul of criminal law. All of this sounds perfectly reasonable – so why is the BBFC so reviled by many of the smaller British home-video labels?

The board has always been funded exclusively by the film industry through classification fees. Since the mainstream industry set up the BBFC in the first place in 1912 (to forestall local authorities' threats to enact individual censorship policies), it has always been happy to meet these costs, a drop in the ocean when set against sums recoupable by a big hit whose rights they control across multiple formats. But smaller non-theatrical distributors, who might only shift 1,000 DVDs of a single title as a best-case scenario (500 is not unusual), effectively transfer a substantial

chunk of their production budget to the BBFC through these fees. There used to be a discount for foreign-language films, but this was scrapped years ago, and the present charity discount rate is off limits to purely commercial concerns.

This wouldn't be a problem if the 1984 Video Recordings Act (VRA) didn't make BBFC classification legally compulsory for all commercial video releases bar suitably uncontentious factual and musical titles. Because the bulk of the BBFC's costs are charged on a per-minute basis, the more generous the package assembled by a UK distributor, the higher the requested fee. Even if the theatrical version has already been approved, it has to be vetted again (at a slightly lower rate if genuinely identical) to assess its domestic suitability under tougher criteria. 'Extras' in DVD and Blu-ray packages are also compulsorily scrutinised, and formerly exempt audio commentaries are now treated as additional video works.

The upshot is that smaller British distributors have to choose between paying through the nose to the BBFC and risking not breaking even (the margins on many independent releases are wafer-thin, especially given the Blu-ray format's production and licensing costs), or dropping some of the extras and risking losing sales to internet-savvy customers who are happy to shop around globally.

More seriously, this can also affect the UK licensing of individual titles considered commercially problematic: in extremis, Severin Films pulled out of the UK marketplace altogether, with co-founder Carl Daft citing BBFC charges as a reason.

20 years ago, the BBFC's former director James Ferman refused 'Reservoir Dogs' a video certificate for two years.

Many other countries operate a similar classification system, but usually on a voluntary basis – Germany's FSK incorporates this principle into the first word of its name (Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle der Filmwirtschaft). The approval of the US equivalent, the MPAA, is similarly optional, the penalty for non-compliance in both cases being limited or withheld access to larger distribution channels, depending on their own individual policies. Since this is also how BBFC classification has always worked for theatrical releases (where the cinema's local licensing authority is the ultimate arbiter, allowing film festivals to operate without mass BBFC submissions), this is scarcely a revolutionary concept – especially now that streaming video services are a popular mass medium.

Clearly, vetting YouTube would be a logistical impossibility, as the BBFC tacitly acknowledged when it recently proposed a voluntary classification system for online material, which the minister for creative industries, Ed Vaizey, praised as "a great example of self-regulation... without creating a disproportionate burden on content providers and platforms". But content providers utilising physical platforms are still faced with this burden, which has become more disproportionate thanks to these virtual-media alternatives at a time when margins are being squeezed by this very competition.

Ironically, the VRA was originally passed because differing rules then applied to theatrical and video media (the latter essentially unregulated, except by the blunt instrument of criminal law), so history is effectively repeating itself. And if the most logical conclusion is that the VRA should itself be binned (its fundamentally problematic nature illustrated by the fact that the Thatcher government had to apply to the EU for special dispensation, acknowledging that it inherently ran counter to single-market principles), it's hard to believe that many film buffs would mourn its passing. ☹

DOMINIC BUCHANAN

Meet the producer of *Lilting* and *Gimme the Loot*, a young black contender in the very white world of British film production

By Ashley Clark

These are heady times for Dominic Buchanan, the London-based producer who also serves as head of film and content at commercials company Stink. The 31-year-old's first feature as a producer, Adam Leon's New York-set, low-budget comedy *Gimme the Loot*, won the Grand Jury Prize at 2012's South by Southwest festival and opened to strong reviews in the US and UK. It was announced at Cannes in May that his second film, Hong Khaou's *Lilting* (the eighth feature from Film London's 'Microwave' programme for small-budget filmmakers, and a Stink co-production) will be distributed by Artificial Eye in the UK. Soon after we meet on a drizzly day in London's Fitzrovia, Buchanan takes to Twitter to announce the inaugural recce on *The End of the Fucking World*, a London-set reimagining of the dark-hued comic by US author Charles S. Forsman. It will be executive-produced by Anna Higgs at Film4's 4.0 division and follow Ben Wheatley's *A Field in England* in experimenting with digital forms of distribution.

The relentless diversity of such a slate could potentially frazzle a more fragile soul but Buchanan shows no signs of fatigue. In person a model of self-assurance, confident but not cocky, he's spent the last few years building an impressive portfolio in the film industry. In 2012 he was named one of trade mag *Screen International*'s UK Stars of Tomorrow.

So how did it all get to this point for the man who tells me, "My family didn't have any connections – I was a true outsider"? Born in 1982 to a second-generation Jamaican father and a Welsh mother, Buchanan grew up in London save for a two-year stint in the Bronx from 1987-89. He cites a youth spent watching films alongside his father as his gateway into the medium. No great shakes at school, he flunked his A-levels but buckled down to secure an 'A' grade in a film-studies retake. After completing a film-theory degree at Roehampton University, Buchanan took a filmmaking course at the New York Film Academy, where he got the creative bug and met other like-minded people. When he returned to the UK in 2006, he landed an internship at Miramax's London office, an experience he describes as a great education: "I started to see what a volatile atmosphere looks like, where there's high pressure every day, every minute."

Various roles in film (including stints at the Tribeca and London film festivals) kept Buchanan busy until, in February 2008, he returned to Miramax as assistant to Maeva Gatineau in acquisitions and production. Disaster struck months later when he was unexpectedly laid off ("I'd never been so angry in my life") but his networking and experience had paid dividends. It took him ten days to land a job at Universal in the co-productions and acquisitions department under Christian Grass but in October 2009, in another illustration of the inherent flux of



A bright future: Dominic Buchanan

He points to a current upswing in black British filmmaking talent, citing Kibwe Tavares, Destiny Ekaragha and Amma Asante

the industry, co-chairmen David Linde and Marc Shmuger were unceremoniously fired, sending shockwaves through the company. A consequently deposed Buchanan spent some time kicking his heels working in the HR department before jumping at the chance to join esteemed UK producer Michael Kuhn's Qwerty films as acting head of development.

Under Kuhn's tutelage, Buchanan's interests shifted from acquisitions to production and development, and he made his producing debut with in-house doc *Carrying the Light*. But things started to spark in other areas. *Gimme the Loot*, which he'd been working on independently, had wrapped and was being accepted into major festivals. After 16 valuable months with Kuhn, Buchanan left in February 2012. This type of tough decision-making is endemic in the industry, he points out, but he has no regrets, attributing his career progression to date to a combination of focus, controlled aggression and

an openness to new experiences. When Stink came calling later that year, he says: "I wasn't sitting around pretending I was going to be this independent producer and change the game; I just knew I was going to go on a journey."

How does Buchanan feel about being a young black executive in a world that's traditionally whiter and older? His response is candid: "I've always been conscious of it because *I am* black and young. When I was trying to get into the industry there might've been moments when I hadn't got things because of the colour of my skin. But I made a decision very early on that I was never going to let that be an excuse for failure." He mentions the need for more open dialogue within the industry on matters of diversity but also points to a current, organic upswing in black British filmmaking talent, citing a host of directors with recent or upcoming films including Kibwe Tavares (*Jonah*), Destiny Ekaragha (*Gone Too Far*), Amma Asante (*Belle*) and Debbie Tucker Green (*Second Coming*). "They've done it through determination and they've got the right people around them," he adds, "That resonates more with me than the fact that any sort of quota has been filled." It's a fittingly positive statement from an individual who looks set for a bright future – even if the next step is *The End of the Fucking World*. 

EDINBURGH

CABINET OF CURIOSITIES



Run for cover: Bigfoot hunter Tom Biscardi in Morgan Matthews's documentary *Shooting Bigfoot*

In its second year under new management, the Edinburgh Film Festival has made a virtue of its eclectic programming

By Nick James

On the evidence of the 21 new films I've seen here (plus four from the Jean Grémillon retrospective – see feature p.40), I'm delighted to say that this year's Edinburgh programme is at least as wide-ranging and stimulating as last year's – and the buzz around titles I've missed makes it seem better yet. Which means that Artistic Director Chris Fujiwara's 'festival of discoveries' approach has reconsolidated this distinguished event's reputation for quality after the wobble it experienced in 2011. As his intros to this year's Grémillon screenings also demonstrated, Fujiwara's scholarly passion is quietly infectious, but in packing his programme with small delights and sometimes dud curios, he runs the risk of Edinburgh seeming more of a specialists' convention than perhaps it might.

The breadth of the programme is not in question, and when filmmaker Mark Cousins talks – in the context of his inspiring new clip-based film *A Story of Children and Film*

– about his insistence on drawing on titles from the widest possible pool of national cinemas, he knows he's at a festival that's doing the same. (Cousins himself was a notable artistic director here in the 1990s.) I'll refrain from saying more now about our regular contributor's poetic essay on what children do for cinema, except to say that it samples many rare films as it fascinates and delights. We'll cover it in depth in a future issue.

Of course such eclecticism makes selecting what to see more of a gamble for the audience, as the special selections from South Korea and Sweden here demonstrated. Mans Mansson's **Roland Hassel** (*Hassel – Privatspanarna*), for instance, is a bizarre, rambling, zonked experience in which retired cop Hassel (Lars-

Erik Berenett, who apparently played the same character on TV in the 1980s) gathers sundry companions to re-enact (ineptly) the 1986 assassination of Sweden's Prime Minister Olof Palme. Since everyone behaves like a stumbling idiot, while Hassel looks on intently, you feel black humour bubbling somewhere, but without giving off any odour or pungency. Perhaps you have to be Swedish.

Mikael Marcimain's **Call Girl**, by contrast, goes for the popular jugular in exploring the use of underage prostitutes by the Swedish establishment in the 1970s – further substantiating the black joke that the decade itself should be put on trial. Absconding care-home friends Iris and Sonja fall into the hands of a ruthless madam who services the rich and powerful, who in turn block all police efforts to break up the vice ring. It's all very pious in its ostensible truth-seeking, but the approach to the 70s is reminiscent of Uli Edel's *The Baader Meinhof Complex*, and makes similarly exploitative use of its subject-matter, at times offering the girls as visual candy, seemingly as much for the viewer's delectation as for that of the onscreen dirty old men.

The South Korean films on offer made a more telling contribution. Ryoo Seung-wan's **The Berlin File**, for instance, is a pulsing spy thriller with imagination to match the Jason



Call Girl

Bourne series. The macguffin is a North Korean corruption fund sought by South Korea, the CIA and Mossad; our hero is an NK spy in Germany, surrounded by enemies and colleagues he can't trust – including his wife. All the chase and fight sequences are thrillingly conceived and aesthetically pleasing.

Perhaps the most surprising film I've seen in a while is O Muel's **Jisuel**, described in the EIFF catalogue as "a poetic recreation of a long-hidden tragedy". I don't have the space here to adequately evoke this distinctive if somewhat vaporous film. It deals with the brutal clearance of the island of Jeju in 1948 by South Korean forces under US direction, focusing alternately on a troop of soldiers led by barbarous zealots and a group of simple villagers trying to avoid death by hiding in cave. Two moments that stand out are one where a murdered girl becomes the landscape of the island, and another where villagers lit by a fire in the cave seem to float in black space.

Edinburgh has always been a good place to sample British films, and there were curate's eggs aplenty here too. What would you think if, near the beginning of a film, a scrappy young man who looks more like an actor than anything else jumped on a boat called Tinkerbelt and crowed at the sun? I get twitchy at such heavy signposting, and the problem with Jamie Chambers's **Blackbird**, a paean to Scottish coastal song tradition and mythology, is that it wants to hit you over the head with its ideas. Ruadhan (Andrew Rothney), our angst-ridden, earthbound Peter Pan, feels the decline of local ways as a personal trauma as he watches his mostly aged friends die off with important folk songs in their heads; meanwhile he acts skittish around the girl who went away and has come back on a visit. It's all too precious, with nothing like the tremendous feel for cinema of another festival offering.

For Those in Peril, Paul Wright's fragmentary study of Aaron (George MacKay), a youth ostracised from a similar community. Wright slightly hampers his film by beginning with his coastal Scottish village in deep mourning for five fishermen lost at sea – and immediately expecting the audience to mourn with them. But as we learn more in flashback about the circumstances leading up to Aaron's survival of the same fishing trip, and witness his slow expulsion from the social body, we become more and more aware of a filmmaker reaching for big auteur-cinema gestures – and sometimes pulling them off spectacularly.

You have to admire intrepid British documentary maker Morgan Matthews for his willingness to indulge strange men with guns who claim to believe in an ape-like creature haunting the wilds of the USA. **Shooting Bigfoot** is an investigation somewhat in the Jon Ronson/Louis Theroux 'deadpanning the freaks' tradition but with more than a spooky hint of *The Blair Witch Project* about it too. Matthews homes in on three sets of characters: professional Bigfoot chaser Tom Biscardi – as aggressive as a missing member of the Soprano family – and his team; Rick Dyer – a seemingly semi-paranoid loner hunter who's been accused



My Dog Killer

of hoaxing; and Dallas and Wayne, two rather sweet but gormless rednecks who emit animal calls as if they want to mate with the creature. It's funny, fascinating and frightening by turns.

While in Edinburgh I was mentoring the festival's Student Critics Jury, one of whom convinced me of the deeper virtues of Constantina Voulgaris's **A.C.A.B. (All Cats Are Brilliant)**, a film that irritated and intrigued me by turns. It's a portrait of Electra (Maria Georgiadou), a woman in her thirties who – we learn in fragmentary bursts – demonstrates against government cuts, bakes perfect-looking patisserie, visits her imprisoned anarchist-martyr boyfriend, babysits a rich kid and reads him political tracts, paints, walks her cute collie, deliberately cuts herself, falls asleep reading about Duchamp and visibly diminishes in the company of her overbearing leftist artist parents. Yes, there is a preciousness about

'Blackbird', a paean to Scottish coastal song tradition and mythology, wants to hit you over the head with its ideas

this woman and her milieu, and the Woody Allenesque touches of bourgeois angst seem odd in such an ostensibly collectivist political film, but the dilemma of this mourning Electra is perhaps that of a whole generation who have grown up privileged but are now faced with dire financial and political problems that seem insoluble through traditional means.

More simply effective in describing one nation's plight through a single figure is Mira Fornay's **My Dog Killer (Môj pes Killer)**, an excellent Dardennes-influenced study of Marek (Adam Mihál), a Slovakian neo-Nazi skinhead whose mother abandoned the family for a gypsy. Each scene of Marek's humiliation from all sides achieves the sort of poignancy associated with the Belgian brothers.

These last two films epitomise for me the Fujiwara Edinburgh: tough, analytical works sit alongside the airiest aesthetic fancies. The problem the festival now faces is how to turn itself back into an event that attracts the national press. A slow-building reputation for high quality may get you there in the end, but it may take a few more years – or else some better luck with celebrities. Let's keep our fingers crossed. ☺



Blackbird

A collaboration between director Noah Baumbach and Greta Gerwig, the “Meryl Streep of mumblecore”, ‘Frances Ha’ is a film that reconciles well-trodden themes of New York indie cinema with physical comedy, emotional depth and a knowing affection for the nouvelle vague

By Trevor Johnston



GIRL, INTERRUPTED

NEW YORKER
 Greta Gerwig – left, as
 Frances with flatmate Benji
 (Michael Zegen) – co-wrote
 the script with director
 Noah Baumbach, below



The Japanese, no doubt, have a word for it. The French, several: *savoir faire*, for instance, maybe even *l'art de vivre*. For the twentysomethings in Noah Baumbach's latest serio-comic character piece *Frances Ha*, the term, though, is definitely 'getting your shit together'. And it's something the movie's floundering heroine, played to note-perfect effect by erstwhile mumblecore poster girl Greta Gerwig, is patently failing to accomplish. At the age of 27, Frances is both marginally employed and romantically unmoored. Oh, and her surname isn't actually Ha, that's just part of it. The title merely offers a sly signpost that this is a young woman on the way to becoming herself. Just not there yet.

For one thing, her prospect of being awarded a full-time contract by the downtown modern dance troupe with whom she's been studying looks distinctly iffy. Her male flatmate pronounces her "undateable" and the rock in her life, best pal and confidante Sophie (a sparkily abrasive Mickey Sumner), is about to move on, focused on career and romantic priorities of her own. It's make-or-break time for Frances but then again, in Baumbach's work, it always is. He's fascinated by moments in which individuals are at their most vulnerable, when their sense of who they are is at a pivotal stage: change is threatening, continuity evidently untenable. Ben Stiller's embittered fortysomething man-child in 2010's *Greenberg* reaches crisis point when confronted with the grown-up lives of family and old friends in blithe, hang-loose LA; Nicole Kidman senses the diminishing returns of her own hauteur in *Margot at the Wedding* (2007); while his parents' marital travails challenge teenager Jesse Eisenberg's self-perception in *The Squid and the Whale* (2005); even the befuddled graduates in his 1995 debut *Kicking and Screaming* spend their time comically contemplating the ominous approach of real-world responsibilities.

"I find myself following where the characters take me when I'm writing these movies," reflects Baumbach by phone from New York, "only to find that I'm working out similar themes and exploring these similar transitions in life. Twenty-seven is a distinct moment for Frances but that basic theme of squaring the romantic and egotistical ideas about yourself with who you actually are is very much broader than that. Who you are versus who you thought you were, or versus who you thought you might be – that's still a major thing for a lot of people, no matter what sort of success you might have."

In case that sounds as if Baumbach, or indeed his latest movie, is about to be sucked into navel-gazing self-regard,

it is crucial to note that *Frances Ha*, unlike the piercingly amusing but at times astringent *Greenberg* and *Margot*, serves up its wit and wisdom with a generous measure of the pleasure principle. As she showed in Whit Stillman's *Damsels in Distress* (2011), Gerwig has a natural feel for the contours of a zingy line and here, delivering a script she co-wrote with Baumbach, she never makes the character's social gracelessness or muddle-through resilience seem like a comic routine. Instead the cumulative emotional impact of Frances's often self-inflicted bumps and scrapes is richer because we're laughing with her. The fact that Baumbach shot it in unshowy yet undeniably retro black and white and has marshalled all sorts of vintage treats on the soundtrack, including lashings of *nouvelle vague*-era Georges Delerue and Bowie's 'Modern Love' (in an admitted nod to Carax's 1986 *Mauvais Sang*) only adds to the allure *Frances Ha* will surely hold for knowing arthouse audiences.

New York, black and white, serious comedy: it's a combination that points to one major influence, which Baumbach has no qualms about acknowledging. "Those movies Woody Allen made in black and white with Gordon Willis, they're so majestic, they bring this epic quality to essentially intimate stories," says the 43-year-old Brooklynite, who admits he



grew up so immersed in Allen's output that his own adolescent scribbles amounted to mere imitations. "He's an influence I wholly absorbed but at a certain point I had to shake. Now I'm on the other side of that, there's something so exciting about making movies in this city with him as the person I try to emulate."

Baumbach, it's worth recalling, cast Gerwig in *Greenberg* before Allen called on her services for last year's *From Rome with Love*. For Allen, Gerwig was pretty much as she always is when Hollywood comes calling (cf the Russell Brand remake of *Arthur* and the Ashton Kutcher romcom *No Strings Attached*): likeable, 'kooky' and under-taxed. In marked contrast, her affecting turn in *Greenberg* – as the emotionally unco-ordinated nanny with whom the uptight Stiller forms a predictably awkward liaison – stands as an obvious catalyst for the working (and subsequently personal) partnership which has since brought *Frances Ha* to the screen. "She's funny both verbally and physically, so I thought there was an opportunity to do something here which was, in a way, a showcase for her," says Baumbach, who's recently had the experience of seeing the congruence of his creative and private lives unpicked in unsettlingly forensic detail in the pages of *The New Yorker*, a publication where he once interned and for whom he's written an off-and-on series of sketch pieces.

Frances Ha began as a series of email exchanges which blossomed into a screenplay, a collaboration which has continued through Baumbach and Gerwig's co-authored script for an animated feature now in the Hollywood development pipeline and a second independent movie shot in New York last year with Gerwig again in the lead (currently under wraps until its makers declare it finished). In a separate transatlantic conversation, Gerwig outlined how the beginning of their writing process was daunting – in a good way – after her previous script collaborations on two of the improvised Joe Swanberg titles (*Hannah Takes the Stairs*, *Nights and Weekends*) that first brought her attention as a fresh new screen presence. "The best part of making this with Noah was that, for the first time, I was working with someone who was challenging me to write as precisely as he does. Improv to me is not actually a style I'm very invested in as a writer, because I first fell in love with the idea of dramatic storytelling through the theatre. I mean, things which had to be word-perfect because there was an internal rhythm to each line."

And as an actor? The woman once dubbed "the Meryl Streep of mumblecore" definitely has things to say about the difference between her vulnerable and touching contribution to *Hannah Takes the Stairs* (where Baumbach first spotted her) and the rather more modulated approach to emotional revelation taken in *Frances Ha* – notwithstanding Baumbach's multi-take determination to get exactly what he wanted from each scene. "With Hannah the difficult thing for me was that there was no intermediary between me having an idea and me executing that idea," explains Gerwig, who'll face the milestone of her 30th birthday this August. "Yes, it feels raw and it can yield something that's immediate, but the more freedom I'm given as an actress the worse my performance will be. I'm really more interested in those moments where, like with Frances, I can put them in something that has a superstructure."



With its chapter headings and its own individual twist on generic romcom story beats, Baumbach and Gerwig's writing ensures that *Frances Ha* the movie always knows where it's going even if the same can't be said for its protagonist. That tension between spontaneity and structure is just one of its many charms, allowing it to feel comfortable in its gestures towards the *nouvelle vague* (right down to Frances and her flatmates blocking out a cheeky stolen moment from 1964's *Bande à part*). The clincher, though, is the warmth it displays towards its characters, something which Baumbach intended to mark it apart from his previous offering. "It's definitely the case in *Greenberg* that the movie is going to give Ben's character very little help with his ideas about himself," he admits. "He's going to have to do all the work. He's going to have to make the transition. He's in his forties, so it's a little late for him, whereas Frances in her late twenties is pretty much on track. Here I felt, and Greta felt, that the movie needed to protect Frances and, in a way, to celebrate her."

Celebrate Frances in all her wrong-headed, big-hearted befuddlement it certainly does and, while the movie's velvety assurance shows Baumbach building on his already considerable skillset, the sheer range of moods in Gerwig's deceptively nonchalant yet precisely pointed performance has put down a new marker of her capabilities in front of and behind the camera.

Fittingly, though there are exciting plans afoot to shoot Mia Hansen-Løve's next project in the autumn, it's also a moment of career transition for Gerwig herself. "I tend to go awry when I look to the idea I'm going to be cast in some fabulous big-budget Hollywood thing and, thankfully, I'm in a position right now where I don't actually have to take acting jobs for money. So in the interim I think I'll just keep making small things on my own. I've found that incredibly rewarding and it's also the process that Frances follows to find herself. It's something I'm going through too, discovering what it means to have ownership. It means I'm no longer waiting on someone else to save me."



Frances Ha is released in the UK on 29 July and is reviewed on page 77

Gerwig's deceptively nonchalant yet precisely pointed performance puts down a new marker of her capabilities in front of and behind the camera

THREE'S A CROWD
Her new male flatmates bring complications for Frances, above

DECONSTRUCTING FRANCES

Director Noah Baumbach and co-writer and star Greta Gerwig talk us through the key elements of 'Frances Ha'

1 DANCE
An apprentice in a modern dance troupe, Frances (Greta Gerwig) often expresses her singularity through unexpected movement.

GG: Here the performance became something of a dance and I felt I could act from head to toe, because Noah kept the camera quite far back. That's something usually reserved for dancers

like Fred Astaire or comedians like Keaton and Chaplin, where you see the whole body and that's who the character is.

NB: Dance accomplishes so much for us in the movie because it's romantic, it's very visual, it's a great metaphor for Frances's struggle and for that time in your life – because it's an occupation with an expiry date for everyone who commits to it.

2 FRIENDSHIP
Frances is closest to her best friend Sophie (Mickey Sumner, below left), but this makes her resistant to change for either of them.

GG: We never started out saying we were going to make a love story between these two friends but it just emerged in the writing of the scenes. Then we went back and actually beat

it out like a romcom: she has the girl, she loses the girl, she tries to make the girl jealous. It's like there's a will-they-won't-they tension to the story but you're never quite sure what they will or won't do.

NB: When we started exploring this period in someone's life, friendship just seemed like the major relationship. I know it was for me.





3.

3 BOYS *The notion that Frances may be right for her flatmate Benji (Michael Zegen, above left) is a tantalising suggestion.*

GG: We didn't want Frances to be the sad girl who couldn't get a date. It had to be clear she was choosing this lifestyle as opposed to not having any other choices. She's kind of androgynous; she's not unappealing to other men but she's just not doing it.

NB: Benji's similar to Frances because he's still living in a fantasy world. He's writing a spec sequel to *Gremlins* and there's no version of that which is going to work out. Yet there was something sweet between the two of them, which never disrupted her relationship with Sophie, or was dishonest towards the characters.

4 COMEDY *A waitressing gig at a college fundraiser prompts unexpected confrontations and a tonal shift towards knockabout comedy.*

GG: There were so many comic elements in this whole sequence that we did wonder if we were going too far. Was this leaving the world that we'd built? Then again, it happens when the characters' individual circumstances are topsy-turvy

too, not just for Frances but for Sophie, so somehow we thought the movie could hold it. You can push it so far when the audience knows these are real people. You can't start there, with Mickey playing, like, crazy drunk. You need to ramp up to it.



4.



5.

5 PARIS *Frances embarks on an impulsive and financially destructive trip to Paris that's memorable for all the wrong reasons.*

NB: In another movie, an impetuous act might change the character's life for the better—a visit to the world's most romantic city prompts some amazing maturation or something. But here it's a total bust. It seemed really funny

for the audience to know that we actually went to the expense of flying the crew over there to share in Frances's disastrous weekend. And, of course, it's the only section of the movie without Georges Delerue music. It's Delerue for Brooklyn but for Paris: Hot Chocolate's 'Every 1's a Winner'. Such a great song.

6 GROWN-UPS *A dinner party with fearsomely successful NY grown-ups shows Frances struggling to maintain her shit-together facade.*

GG: I've been at dinner parties with successful people talking about how difficult it is to, you know, find a good maid. The temptation is to get drunk to the point of inappropriate, because this is simply beyond any conversation you ever imagined

yourself having. Noah, though, I think has more sympathies for the other people at the table thinking, "Who is this girl?"

NB: The sweetness of Frances comes from the way the same spirit which leads her to put her foot in her mouth so often also compels her to deliver a romantic monologue about what she wants from life, which is not only really appealing, it's just such a brilliant truth about that character.



6.

KID ON A BIKE

The first film ever to be shot in Saudi Arabia by the country's first female director, 'Wadjda' charts the injustices faced by Saudi women through the eyes of a girl who dreams of a bicycle. Haifaa al Mansour explains how she made her film in a land where cinemas are illegal

By Isabel Stevens

"My name is Haifaa al Mansour and I'm working on a script about a young Saudi girl." So began the 2007 email plea Saudi director al Mansour sent to as many Western film companies she could find online that did co-productions. The resulting silence didn't come as much of a surprise: who would take a chance on a first-time director from a country with no history of showing or producing films – and where cinemas are actually illegal? "We don't have the cinematic heritage of other Arab countries such as Egypt or Morocco," al Mansour explains. "People invest in films from directors and countries that know how to make them." Five years would pass before her spirited, sneaker-clad rebel protagonist received a standing ovation in Venice and widespread critical acclaim.

"A bicycle is no flatscreen," says al Mansour but for *Wadjda's* titular 11-year-old, living in a strictly controlled, gender-segregated society, "it's as much a symbol of modernity." *Wadjda's* mother is incredulous when her daughter asks for one. "Have you ever seen a girl ride a bicycle?" she demands. The film follows *Wadjda's* quest for two wheels and her need to prove to her friend Abdullah that she can beat him in a race. Ever resourceful, she discovers a sudden interest in the Koran when a recital competition promises the money she needs. The film shows the narrow age-window in the life of a Saudi girl when she can still get away with being cheeky, questioning the world around her and talking to Abdullah on the street before the black *abaya* robe beckons and, after that, marriage.

"I come from a very liberal family. I've never had a ceiling on my dreams," explains al Mansour. "But also I come from a small town and I went to a government school. A lot of my classmates there had so much potential and wanted to do so many things. But from the age of 15 they were married off and their lives changed completely. This film is for them. Every ideology in society falls on middle-class girls. They have to protect all the values: that women have to stay home; they have to get married; not to work with men."

In *Wadjda*, the bicycle could have become an all-too-easy metaphor for freedom. The film, after all, is a pro-

test song but it's one in which character comes first. Al Mansour cites two neorealist works as her influences: the Dardenne brothers' *Rosetta* (1999) and Jafar Panahi's *Offside* (2006), both of which register a cruel world through young female eyes. In *Wadjda* the religious police are mentioned; there's gossip about a girl caught with a boy who's not a family member. But mostly al Mansour zones in on small acts of rebellion – *Wadjda* colouring her sneakers in black so they can pass as school uniform or scribbling her name on her father's male-only family tree.

The most remarkable thing about al Mansour is that she exists at all – for how, in your formative years, do you become a cinephile and a filmmaker when films on TV "suddenly jump" and when, to go to the cinema, you have to drive to a neighbouring country? "The best days of my childhood were when we watched a movie. I could see beyond my geographical boundaries," she recalls. "Most of the films I saw were American or Bollywood; not intellectual or arthouse films – those don't exist in Saudi. They don't rent them in video stores or show them on TV."

After working in the oil industry al Mansour decided, at the age of 30, to go to film school in Australia – because, as she says, "I wanted to have my own voice." There she discovered Italian neorealism and realised "you don't have to recreate a reality in a studio, you can just shoot in the street." A number of short films followed, all made and financed by herself ("they were more independent than what is independent"). Then came her controversial documentary short *Women Without Shadows* (2005).

"I interviewed women of different ages," she recalls. "There always had to be a male member of the family present but it was amazing what I found. For my mother's generation, there was little education and the society was poorer but they used to work with men and had more say in the household because they contributed economically. The conservative ideology arose with urbanisation and with the country becoming richer. Then my generation came along and they are very afraid of everything. The younger 'Wadjda' generation that I spoke to



FOOTLOOSE
Wadjda (Waad Mohammed, above) modifies her sneakers for school in the film by Saudi Arabian writer-director Haifaa al Mansour, right



— they were feisty, they feel they belong to a larger world through the internet and they don't want to do things in the same way. But I also interviewed a religious figure about the practice of face covering and he said that it wasn't really from Islam but from the culture and that women could be considered veiled if they just covered their hair. In Saudi, women think that it is not allowed for them to show their faces. I contrasted his statements with what the women I interviewed believe and then

I screened the film to journalists and everything went crazy. His religious peers were asking, 'How could he say things like that?' He then wrote a letter to all the newspapers retracting what he had said. But it made the film famous and it created a debate."

THE STREETS OF SAUDI

At the heart of *Wadjda* is the issue of the female voice. "Women in Saudi are always invisible but they are also silenced," says al Mansour. The outspoken Wadjda is constantly being told off and warned that people can hear her. However, for the competition scene in which she sings verses from the Koran, al Mansour "wanted her voice to be both beautiful and vulnerable. I wasn't trying to show religion specifically as oppressive".

Finding a girl who could both act and sing was a long process. "We come from a culture that is not very close to our feelings," the director points out. "To open up in front of the camera is quite a big thing. But it was at least easier to cast the young girls. They are not at the age where they have to wear a veil. It was still an issue with the children in the school — we didn't have access to everyone... Waad's family are OK with her being in the film



The younger 'Wadjda' generation I spoke to feel they belong to a larger world through the internet and they don't want to do things in the same way

but they don't want her to be an actress when she grows up. Now she's a little girl she can have some fun. When she's older she has to take a more respectable occupation – a doctor or a teacher, but not an entertainer.” Of Saudi TV actress Reem Abdullah, who plays Wadja's mother, al Mansour says, “it was a very different style of acting to what she's used to. I wanted something much more subtle. It was important that you could feel what she is thinking even when her face was covered.”

The difficulty of finding a cast and crew and of getting permission to film in Saudi meant the only previous nationally funded feature, *Keif al Hal* (2006), was shot in neighbouring UAE. By contrast, *Wadja* spends as much time roaming the dusty roads of Riyadh as it does behind closed doors, highlighting the huge gulf between public and private worlds. For al Mansour it was crucial to shoot in Saudi. The big screen has transported audiences to cities all over the Middle East but, she says, “nobody knows what the streets of Saudi are like.”

“Getting permission as a female director wasn't that difficult,” she continues. “We had a very good line producer who did a lot of TV before and he treated it like any other TV show and it went through. For the authorities there is no problem but then you have to deal with the public. A lot of people were very welcoming and would stop us and want to appear. But a lot also weren't – they felt the film was threatening their values. They had never seen a woman with a camera before.” Getting around such restrictions entailed a lot of planning, location scouting and petitioning for access. “A government school would have never let us shoot there. So we had to find a private one that looked like a government school.” One scene in a mall proved particularly difficult when permission to shoot was refused at the last minute.

“We chose certain times of the day when there was lighter traffic and we tried to choose neighbourhoods that were more tolerant,” she explains. “But we still ended up in some conservative places. In Saudi you can't escape them. The landscape in some of these areas is amazing – for example the end scene, when she rides the bike. I wanted to pan around an urban landscape and end up on an open horizon.” But the only place they could find was a very conservative area, which meant al Mansour had to direct from the back of a van. “I had a monitor, a walkie-talkie and a telephone,” she says. “We would rehearse the scene before and the DP would block it. Then I would disappear but my voice would stay there, telling

Waad to look up. It made me work more closely with the actors so if we were separated they knew what to do.”

The ban on cinemas, in place since the 1980s, means Saudis may miss *Wadja* on the big screen (the film lost out on an Oscar nomination as a result) but it was vital for al Mansour that they can see it on DVD or TV. “I tried not to film anything that would be censored but you never really know what they might not like,” she says. “It's crazy and unpredictable but I hope they won't cut anything.” She says she tried to make the film as authentic as possible. “I added details – phrases, particular accents, jokes – that Westerners won't notice but that Saudis' will.”

Despite its sense of humour and its irrepressible protagonist, al Mansour's film laments the sad reality of life for many women, particularly in the story of Wadja's mother. While faithful to the girl's point of view, it details, through snatches of arguments, her mother's precarious situation: that since she hasn't given birth to a son, her husband may be matched with another wife. But it is also a film that's hopeful of the changes that a younger generation could bring.

As far as establishing a film culture in Saudi is concerned, there is still a long way to go. Discussion of film is difficult in private, let alone in public. “Male short and documentary filmmakers come together and discuss their films,” al Mansour explains. “I know them but it's hard for me to go to their homes and join them. The entertainment business is not considered acceptable for a respectable woman. Acting is still limited. There is not a lot of representation of Saudi women on television but a few from richer families are becoming writers or TV hosts. A new Saudi is coming and the arts will play a role in defining the nation.” Although she has received death threats, al Mansour believes that overall, “people are proud of how the film has been received abroad.”

Over the last year, there have been reports of a group of young Saudi filmmakers organising clandestine (and so far male-only) screenings, yet al Mansour believes it's important to lobby for film legally. “I didn't want to make a film that the rest of the world will see but that Saudi people won't,” she insists. “I don't believe in being an outsider and saying whatever you want. It is good to make films as part of a domestic art scene – to help influence things from within.”

i *Wadja* is released in the UK on 19 July and is reviewed on page 90

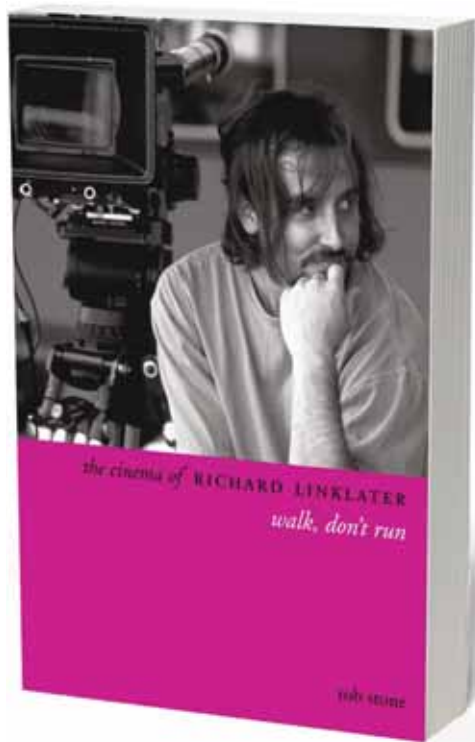
Getting permission to film as a female director wasn't that difficult. For the authorities there's no problem but then you have to deal with the public

LIFE CYCLES
Wadja (Waad Mohammed, left), is obsessed with getting a bicycle but her mother (TV actress Reem Abdullah, right) has concerns about her own place in the family





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TABLEAUX VIVANTS
In *Only God Forgives*, Nicolas Winding Refn frames Julian (Ryan Gosling, both pics) in static compositions



GODS AND MONSTERS

'Only God Forgives' may reunite maverick Danish director Nicolas Winding Refn with star Ryan Gosling, but there's more to it than just a rehash of their 2011 hit 'Drive'

By Kim Newman



The oddity in Nicolas Winding Refn's filmography is *Nemesis* (2007), a straightforward ITV adaptation of an Agatha Christie novel with Geraldine McEwan as the spinster sleuth Miss Marple. Strangely, Christopher Petit – a genre-deconstructing auteur from an earlier generation – has exactly the same weird blip of cosiness on his CV: Petit followed *Radio On* (1979), *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* (1982), *Flight to Berlin* (1984) and *Chinese Boxes* (1984) with *A Caribbean Mystery* (1989), with Joan Hickson as Miss Marple. Christie could be ruthless – of the many film adaptations of her usually retitled 1939 masterpiece *Ten Little Niggers*, only the Soviet *Desyat negrityat* (1987) has the nerve to be as vicious as the novel – but *Nemesis* and *A Caribbean Mystery* are fully in the comfort-viewing mode established by many British television repackagings of her world of intricate crime and dispassionate retribution. One can imagine Winding Refn chortling at the thought of admirers of his punk-inflected Danish *Pusher* trilogy (1996–2005) or *Bleeder* (1999) tuning in, hoping for edgy (in the older and newer senses of the slang term – jittery and transgressive) thrills, then getting tea in the vicarage and punctured alibis.

With his new film *Only God Forgives*, Winding Refn similarly goes against what might have been expected of his next move following the commercially successful and critically lauded *Drive* (2011). Despite the holding-over of suddenly hot, ineffably cool *Drive* star Ryan Gosling and a return to the gangster genre, this feels more like an oblique sequel to the director's unconventional Viking saga *Valhalla Rising* (2009). Based on a novel by James Sallis, *Drive* has a fluid, seductive manner, with perfectly interlocking plot and subplots and set pieces that – as the title suggests – involve movement; by contrast, *Only God Forgives* consists almost exclusively of tableaux, sometimes framed as if they're wax-museum dioramas, sometimes explored by creeping camera advances that evoke Kubrick or Lynch. *Drive* is a car-themed American gangster movie, with precedents like Sam Peckinpah's *The Getaway* (1972) and Walter Hill's *The Driver* (1978); *Only God Forgives* is an essay in the Thai gangster film, a form whose minimal international profile is based primarily on Oxide and Danny Pang's two versions of *Bangkok Dangerous* (1999, 2008).

Like the Welshman Gareth Evans, winding up in Indonesia for his breakthrough film *The Raid* (2012), Winding Refn seems to have picked his location almost at random and inherited a whole local genre to go with it. Much of the dialogue (and all of the karaoke) in *Only God Forgives* is subtitled and the credits (and title) are in elaborately designed, beautiful Thai script. A foreign language for almost all audiences, it's supposed to be visually appealing, but not really understood – which is partly the effect the film goes for as a whole. It has the feel of something

intensely art-directed, but in fact uses real locations: the boxing club with attached nightspot and seductively patterned wallpaper is exactly that, and the hotels, streets and restaurants that feature are all found spaces too. The fact that one establishing shot makes Bangkok look exactly like the dystopia of *Blade Runner* (1982) was probably a bonus reference. In Winding Refn's universe, this Thailand evokes the haunted hotel of *FearX* (2002) and the theatrical headspace of *Bronson* (2008), darkly shadowed but with blocks of blood red and night blue, inhabited by brutal men who've obliterated their own identities by repeatedly bloodying their hands.

FAMILY VALUES

The plot nugget here is a gangland commonplace that goes back to the line used by Cagney imitators hitching their shoulders and snarling, "Are you the dirty rat who killed my brother?" At the start of the film we meet brothers Billy (Tom Burke) and Julian (Gosling), who run vice rackets in Bangkok. After a narrative ellipsis, a 16-year-old prostitute is found by the police – raped and murdered by Billy, whose own battered-to-death body is also discovered. Those who will find this film too violent should note that it's implied that the rape killing and subsequent revenge (inflicted by the girl's father-pimp) are far more extreme than the acts the director does choose to show.

Enigmatic retired cop Chang (Vithaya Pansringarm) surveys the carnage and proceeds to exact his own distinctive form of justice. After listening to the father's explanation of what he has done – which includes whining about the economic necessity of pimping out his daughters – Chang draws a signature sword (the sound effect suggests an unseen scabbard but it looks like the weapon is concealed in his backbone) and chops off the man's arm. The father isn't being punished for Billy's murder, however, so much as for his earlier crimes against the dead girl.

An even more monstrous parent now enters the frame: Julian's mother Crystal (Kristin Scott Thomas), who arrives after "a ten-thousand mile flight" to ask her son why he hasn't avenged his brother. (When told that her favoured son raped and killed the girl, she says, "I'm sure he had his reasons.") Crystal, who has previously manipulated Julian into murdering his own father, arranges in businesslike fashion for the avenger to be executed, but also pays for a hit on the literally untouchable Chang – which brings about an inevitable doom.

Gosling's Julian is the visual centre of the film (and the poster), but Winding Refn's film couldn't be mistaken for *Drive 2*. The Driver was constantly on the move, but Julian is almost always standing still, seldom speaking (an IMDb thread is headed "Ryan Gosling has



Julian's real crime is standing by and doing nothing – enabling his brother and mother to commit a string of atrocities

17 lines”, which isn’t too far off the mark – though few other characters say more), refraining from acting. Gosling is the star, in the sense that the project literally revolved around him: when he stepped in to replace Hobbiton-bound Luke Evans, the project morphed so that the foreign gangsters in Thailand were American rather than British (severing possible ties with *Bronson*). This shift requires Burke and Thomas not to use their own accents, though trace elements of the characters’ original scripted nationality remain: aside from Richard Gere in *American Gigolo*, how many American crime-movie characters are called Julian?

Gosling spends a lot of time in *Only God Forgives* looking at his fists, perfectly framed by Winding Refn so that we do too, but the one time Julian gets into a fight he is unable to land a single punch on his opponent. Thereafter, panda-eyed by bruising, he makes a half-hearted move away from evil, shooting a confederate his mother has sent to kill Chang’s small daughter. Still he remains, like the pimp-father-avenger, deserving of proportionate punishment rather than forgiveness. Julian attracts the condemnation of this film’s avenging ‘God’ by committing a blink-and-you’ll-miss-it murder on screen, but his real crime is persistently standing by and doing nothing – enabling his brother and mother to commit what we take to be just the latest in a whole string of atrocities, a violence shown on screen only by inference as Billy and Crystal are appallingly, brutally rude to polite Thais they treat as minions.

MOTHER LOVE

As an incarnation of the gangster’s monster mother – an archetype memorably essayed by Margaret Wycherly in Raoul Walsh’s *White Heat* (1949) and (especially) Anjelica Huston in Stephen Frears’s *The Grifters* (1990) – Kristin Scott Thomas is astonishing. Walsh affronted audiences by having middle-aged tough-guy psychopath James Cagney sit in his mother’s lap like a monster baby as she advises him to murder an unreliable member of his gang, while Huston’s bottle-blond conwoman explicitly seduces and kills her hapless son (John Cusack). Winding Refn goes even further in examining the incestuous relationship between Crystal and her boys: Julian fingers a Thai hooker’s vagina in a manner that clearly shows the direction of his obsession, and ultimately gets to thrust his hand through a sword-



slash in his mother’s stomach to get back to the womb.

The moral focus of *Only God Forgives* is Vithaya Pansringarm – previously glimpsed in globetrotting franchise entries like *The Prince & Me: The Elephant Adventure* (2010), *Largo Winch II: The Burma Conspiracy* (2011) and *The Hangover Part II* (2011). He is the film’s ‘God’, skilled in ultra-violence yet ineffably moral, and as such the direct successor to Mads Mikkelsen’s immortal-seeming One-Eye in *Valhalla Rising* and Gosling’s scorpion-jacketed Driver. Chang is a karaoke cop whose uniform gives him official legal status, though he is as much arresting officer and executioner as Judge Dredd. He finds the middleman who arranged a messy assassination attempt (in which the hitmen kill everyone in a café except the intended victim) in an upscale restaurant and tortures him for information as if it’s a ritual or performance – taking pins from diners’ hairdos and knives from elaborate dishes to stick into limbs and eyes and ears while also lecturing, as if performing some form of punitive acupuncture. There are other cops on the team, but they stand around, arranged like extras in an opera providing an onstage audience for an aria, and simply watch Chang go to work.

Like One-Eye, whose name echoes Kirk Douglas’s one-eyed rogue in *The Vikings* (1958), Chang is a walking compendium of genre-movie associations, taking one trick with a pan of boiling oil flung into a gunman’s face from Fritz Lang’s *The Big Heat* (1953) and dispensing justice like Kitano Takeshi’s *Violent Cop* (1989), without the interior agony but with the sentimental attachment to family.

At the end of *Only God Forgives*, Chang isn’t the sole survivor, but he is uniquely whole and wholly himself. These are privileged characters in Winding Refn’s world; he never needs to make sequels (outside the *Pusher* cycle) because his gods simply reappear in fresh forms, fresh generic surroundings, whenever they are needed. Even McEwan’s Miss Marple – the most inflexibly moral and inherently terrifying of classical detectives – is another face of Mikkelsen’s One-Eye, Gosling’s Driver and Pansringarm’s Chang. They stand outside chaos, biding their time, missing nothing, ready always for action even in stillness, with a skillset that includes the ability to draw a mystic sword of justice from nowhere to cut to the heart – or womb – of the matter. These gods *can* forgive, but they don’t. ☹

i *Only God Forgives* is released in the UK on 2 August and will be reviewed in the next issue

SWORD OF VENGEANCE
Below: Chang (Vithaya Pansringarm) confronts gang boss Crystal (Kristin Scott Thomas) in *Only God Forgives*. Top: *Valhalla Rising*



THE LIFE OF RYAN

His ascent to the Hollywood A list may seem effortless but in getting there, leading man of the moment Ryan Gosling has shown an ironic self-awareness and notable good taste

By Hannah McGill

Myths mushroom around the paths taken by the famous to stardom: tales of catching a casting director's eye; about stumbling, somehow, into the path of a camera; about happenstance and chance encounter and the world so, so nearly never getting to glimpse what they have to offer.

For male screen performers these stories serve to dispel the suspicion that they may have striven for artistic recognition or placed themselves deliberately in the way of fame. Such self-regard could be deemed effete, the implication goes; such hunger might read as counter-cool. So: John Wayne began as a prop man making deliveries to the studio lot, Harrison Ford was an on-set carpenter and neither Mel Gibson nor Johnny Depp had any intentions loftier than giving a buddy a lift to an audition. Then immortality beckoned.

Not so Ryan Gosling. It isn't an option for this most celebrated and fetishised of current leading men to claim that he showed up on the A list by accident. Gosling was a child entertainer, groomed for stardom; before cornering the market in damaged hard cases and offbeat romantic leads he appeared alongside Christina Aguilera, Justin Timberlake and Britney Spears as a Disney Channel Mouseketeer. Interestingly, the taint of tackiness seems not to have clung. Gosling's vibe is that of someone devoid of the Baby Jane Hudson gene – the addiction to people-pleasing, the burn to be adored. He may have been weaned on craft service but he really does seem as if he could have been discovered pumping gas. And his ascendance to the big leagues has looked, if stately of pace, at least preternaturally unencumbered by poor choices, either professional or personal.

Partly this must be down to luck; the gifted and the gorgeous fall by the wayside every blockbuster season, never to be seen again. One also feels inclined to diagnose good taste. Since his grown-up breakthrough as a Jewish neo-Nazi in Henry Bean's *The Believer* (2001), Gosling has appeared in a solid set of intellectually and stylistically interesting films, if not an unbroken run of masterpieces. He seems to play to his particular strengths – knowingness wedded to outsiderish vulnerability; off-centre



Handsome is as handsome does: Gosling as Luke in Derek Cianfrance's *The Place Beyond the Pines*

good looks; a potent but permeable sort of machismo – with the consequence that he rarely seems wasted or miscast (maybe in the puddle-deep 2011 romcom *Crazy, Stupid, Love*, in which the role of a sleekly irresistible lothario might have better suited a Kutcher or a Timberlake – one a little less haunted of eye and knitted of brow).

This consistency coexists with range: Nick Cassavetes's drippy romance *The Notebook* (2004) won him countless teen girls' hearts without typecasting him as totty; two years later, Ryan Fleck's *Half Nelson* scored him an Oscar nomination but didn't strand him in socially-conscious Sean Penn territory. Committed as he can seem to a role – and he's been strikingly emotional on screen, notably in Derek Cianfrance's break-up melodrama *Blue Valentine* (2010) – there's an aloofness about Gosling, even a sort of mocking quality, that confers something coolly untouchable on his performances. This served him particularly well in Nicolas Winding Refn's silly but stylish *Drive* (2011), in which he secured the young male vote as a nameless, dauntless, *nouveau*-Eastwood anti-hero.


It's hard to say which came first: the sense that Gosling was always slightly aware of himself or the internet memes. Whichever it was, just as his features are separated from dumb prettiness by a certain ironic, sidelong glint, so Gosling's star persona has a self-referential dimension. The memes to which he's central poke gentle fun at his intense performances and his potency as a love object for the wan and sensitive. A powerful online presence can do odd things to a famous person's image. Just ask Christian Bale, with whom Gosling will soon co-star in Terrence Malick's new project. One of the first movie actors to attract a passionate cyber-fanbase, Bale also faced

worldwide opprobrium when a tantrum recorded on set was leaked and went viral.

In Gosling's case there's not much scorn as yet but already it's as if his actual, active sex-symbol status coexists with a caricature of itself – like he's got a sideline as a Ryan Gosling drag act. And the doubling has started to come through in his films. His character in Cianfrance's *The Place Beyond the Pines* (2012) is nicknamed Handsome Luke and has the words 'Heart Throb' tattooed around his collarbone; his beauty is scarred with a statement of his beauty.

It's to be hoped that being a standing internet joke, albeit a very affectionate one, doesn't get Gosling too self-conscious about his sex appeal. One thinks with trepidation of Johnny Depp, whose hyper-awareness of the power of his looks seems to have driven him ever further from playing real people and deeper into wearying panto turns. Still, Gosling is less of a conventional beauty than Depp – and a much more nuanced actor; and he may well have the good sense not to Google himself too frequently.

The Place Beyond the Pines lost a great deal by ripping him untimely from its narrative but by doing so it proved his worth as a lead. The rest of the film, for all its Bradley Coopers and Ray Liottas, ached for Gosling's unassuming charisma and that emotional force he commands. It's not that Gosling can save any project – he parted company from *The Lovely Bones* (2009), while *Gangster Squad* (2013) has weaknesses he couldn't fix and, indeed, was the colder for that slight, permanent chill of his.

Gosling is an intriguing mix to have around. An actor celebrated for his intensity who always seems to be holding something back; a sex symbol who's above all of that; a teen idol with an old soul. 



A WORLD APART

For a post-apocalyptic landscape, the Austrian Alps are a domineering, photogenic departure. All the more impressive, then, that 'The Wall' director Julian Pölsler has captured Marlen Haushofer's novel of separation and survival in its intended setting without sacrificing its interior humanity

By Jonathan Romney



LOST AND HOUND
Martina Gedeck, above, as
the Woman in *The Wall*, the
new film by Austrian director
Julian Pölsler, right

The titular Wall in Julian Pölsler's new film takes, you might say, some getting over. It's a bold visual metaphor carried off with striking economy but the Austrian director requires the viewer to take an imaginative leap, to see the enigmatic Wall in its poetic and philosophical dimension and not just as a clever low-budget science-fiction device – although that quite fairly sums up the premise on which *The Wall* is built.

For the Wall is invisible, yet indisputably solid: a mysterious barrier that springs up one day in the Austrian Alps, blocking all access and leaving one nameless woman (played by Martina Gedeck) stranded in an only sometimes hospitable mountain landscape.

The Wall's heroine is effectively a female, landlocked Robinson Crusoe – a comparison that has often been made by admirers, including Doris Lessing, of the source novel *Die Wand* by Austrian writer Marlen Haushofer. Pölsler, a prolific director of TV films since the early 1990s, has adapted Haushofer's text faithfully but distinctively in a stark but extremely moving film which rather stretches our current understanding of Austrian cinema. We tend, perhaps rigidly, to think of that country's screen output as embodying austerity, formal detachment and confrontational social/moral comment, on the evidence of directors such as Michael Haneke, Ulrich Seidl, Jessica Hausner and Markus Schleinzer (*Michael*).

Pölsler's film is rather different. It is at once restrained, intimate, lyrical and very beautiful. It's austere in places, in others almost lush in its depiction of nature and melancholic solitude. It's Austrian in another way: a sort of modern *Heimatfilm*, as well as an existential speculation on humanity's place in an indifferent universe. In its imposing simplicity, *The Wall* is open to varying interpretations: several viewers have told Pölsler that the film moved them deeply because they felt it was about mourning. Certainly *The Wall* is as much a facing-up to imagined End Times as those other recent minor-key apocalypses John Hillcoat's *The Road* or Béla Tarr's *The Turin Horse* – although *The Wall* rather more optimistically offers hope for humanity's reconciliation with the world.

First published in 1963, Haushofer's novel was long overlooked, only to become a bestseller in German-speaking countries in the 1980s, a decade after the author's death in 1970. The story is narrated by an unnamed middle-aged woman, writing her testimony. On holiday at an Alpine hunting lodge, she finds one day that her hosts have failed to come home and, setting out with their dog Luchs (Lynx), she finds her path blocked by an invisible, impenetrable barrier. The Wall is what in science fiction would be called a force field; Haushofer's heroine quickly surmises that it is the product of a military operation that has possibly killed everyone in the world except her. The people she can see on the other side of it are frozen like statues, an image eerily evoked in the film. The novel acutely voices the nuclear anxieties of the early 1960s, which partly explains its popularity two decades later.

In his adaptation, Pölsler elides the Woman's speculations about the Wall and evokes its tangibility through a discreet soundtrack device, an ominous electronic buzz. Never explained, the Wall is presented by Pölsler as a radically anti-realist given that motivates the rest of an otherwise entirely realistic fiction, and so clarifies the book's essential theme. This is a story about humanity and nature, and about what it means to commit oneself to survival. The Woman takes a conscious decision to survive, which she does by

devoting herself to toil on the land and to caring for the animals that come to depend on her, as she does on them: a cow and its calf, a cat and kitten and the faithful Lynx, who becomes her most intimate other.

Pölsler's film takes Haushofer's punctilious, detached descriptions of the Woman's life as a cue for a sweeping essay on mountainscapes and the passing of seasons. The film was shot in the Gosau region of Upper Austria over 14 months, an unusually extended production that explains why the credits list no fewer than nine cinematographers, including Martin Gschlacht (also one of the producers) and sometime Haneke collaborator Christian Berger. All the more extraordinary, then, that Pölsler has managed to create a unified visual style, fundamentally unfussy – apart from one or two more expressionistic dream sequences – yet often displaying a monumental painterly quality, with echoes of German Romantic art. And if the imagery borders occasionally on the prettified, one feels that is as much the fault of the Alps themselves as of the film; there's no helping the fact that some mountain ranges are inherently kitsch.

While Haushofer's narrator refers to a dead husband and two adult daughters, the Woman's past is never mentioned in the film, placing the emphasis simply on her intensely active inhabiting of the landscape. That calls for an extraordinarily strong onscreen presence from Gedeck, whose role (hiking through forests, scything, toting bales of hay) requires a very athletic commitment. Gedeck must also embody the character's absolute solitude, which partly comes across in the calm detachment of her narrating voice. And the German actress evokes, with superbly nuanced



undemonstrativeness, the emotional shifts within a character who has no human presence to interact with.

It is perhaps Pölsler's most daring move to make Gedeck's sober, understated voiceover a sustaining thread of the film. This highlights the narration as a vital gesture in itself but also builds into the film a fundamental split between past and present (visibly evident in one scene when the Woman looks out through the barred window of her hunting lodge at herself a year earlier, walking freely in the landscape). For all its cautiously affirmative faith in humanity's capacity for survival, the film finally (not unlike *The Turin Horse*) suggests that the universe is slowly but inexorably closing in on us; that, to paraphrase Bob Dylan, we're not dead yet but we're getting there.

In paring down Haushofer's already spare text, Pölsler foregrounds the story's quality as a purely existential drama of survival. But other resonances of the book remain present, if not overtly stated. Haushofer's book was belatedly acclaimed as a feminist statement and Pölsler's film is a rare screen example of a



The sound of the Wall is the sound of Nothing but it's a noisy Nothing – it's a disturbing silence. In fact, I tried using nothing but is sounded like a technical fault

➡ powerful solo female presence commanding the screen, with Gedeck's Woman eventually jettisoning the cultural uniform of femininity (she ends up cropping her hair, not so much becoming androgynous as transcending sexual identity).

This is also a drama about division. The novel's German title may not itself allude to the Berlin Wall – for which the usual word is *Mauer* rather than *Wand* – but the story is clearly about a world violently divided and a present irrevocably sheared from the past. And although nothing is made explicit in either film or book, the story is inescapably readable in the context of 20th-century Austro-German history, with the Woman facing the implications of living as a survivor in a world in which millions have died.

But in filming Haushofer's book, Pölsler has opened it up to another meaning: he's turned it into a parable of cinema. For the Wall – this invisible but absolute glassy division before our eyes – is also the camera lens. Behind it, the space of fiction is cordoned off from us, always vividly alive for us to gaze at but never tangible; always irreducibly, perhaps even tragically, out of reach.

Jonathan Romney: The film tells a story that's both interior and exterior. It's about what happens to the Woman in the landscape but it's just as much about what's going on in her mind.

Julian Pölsler: The Wall is only outside of her in the first two confrontations with it and then it's much more inside of her; there are many walls. This is what Marlen Haushofer wrote about – she wasn't happy in her marriage, this was the 50s and 60s in Austria and people were very closed. She was in a little town, her husband was a dentist, a very good-looking man, who was seen as a hero everywhere and they all said, "Poor man, he has such a silly wife, sitting and writing."

JR: And, of course, it's a book about writing.

JR: Yes, I think so. She's thinking about her fears as a writer.

JR: It must be a challenge to convey visually the metaphor of the Wall. It's a shock to the viewer when the Woman first touches it but, once you establish it, it works.

JP: That's the reason I decided to use sound. I discovered on the internet that there are people who can hear the rotation of the earth. I thought, "That's very interesting – why can't I hear it?" I asked a friend, a university professor, and he said it's a little like an electromagnetic field. I said, "How does it sound?" He showed me and I thought, "That's it, it's just one 'zzzz'...". The sound of the Wall is a Nothing but it's a noisy Nothing – it's a disturbing silence. In fact, I tried using nothing but it sounded like a technical fault.

[As for the music] first I talked to film composers and they all wanted to make great music – an orchestra with 36 musicians! I said, "No no no no; only one musician." That was why I came to use the Bach partita. I was looking for something that would be like Marlen Haushofer's words, that would give structure and a clear direction. After I'd started shooting, I went to a concert of [violinist] Julia Fischer and I felt it was not only music, it was like speaking – like telling a story in a secret way.

JR: After writing the script and getting finance, what was the first thing you had to do?

JP: The first thing was to find Martina [Gedeck]. At first it was only an Austrian production and I tried to find an Austrian actress. Then I met Emma Thompson in Vienna and I gave her the novel. Then Michael Haneke arranged a meeting with Juliette Binoche but it wasn't possible to block her for 14 months. Then we decided to do it as a German co-production and it was clear that it had to be Martina. I admired her very much in *The Lives of Others* and *The Baader-Meinhof Complex*. Do you think another German actress would have been possible?

JR: I could imagine Nina Hoss. She'd have been different.

JP: I also thought of Nina, because I wanted a smaller person who'd be breaking when there's physical work in front of her. When you give Martina a scythe, you think, "OK, in two days she'll manage it." I also thought of Alexandra Maria Lara and Birgit Minichmayr but they're too young.

JR: But Martina has a very powerful presence.

JP: Yes, and that's what I wanted. For the fragility to be in her acting.

JR: You're working with animals and weather – the ultimate uncontrollables. How flexible did you have to be? What if it rained for a week?

JP: I'd say, "OK, now it's raining, let's do Rain Scene 135." We were shooting in the pasture and suddenly it became greyer and greyer and there were wild clouds up there and I said to the crew and Martina, "Come on, let's do this!" She's always an adventurer. She said, "Yes, let's do it." And we went out in the rain.

JR: Martina Gedeck has said that her role involved having to be as isolated as the character.

JP: She was always away from the crew, always alone. I lived in a hut, she lived in a hut and the crew lived in a hotel. On set she had her own room where she worked on her concentration and where she was alone except for the animals she needed in the next scene.

JR: The film conveys a powerful emotional effect although it's not obviously an emotional film – it's very restrained and precise.

JP: It's a story where less is spoken. I can't imagine hearing an orchestra of 36 musicians, can you?

i **The Wall** is released in the UK on 5 July and was reviewed in our July issue

WALL OF WORDS
The written testament of the Woman (Martina Gedeck) forms the narrative thread of the film and ties it intimately to the source novel

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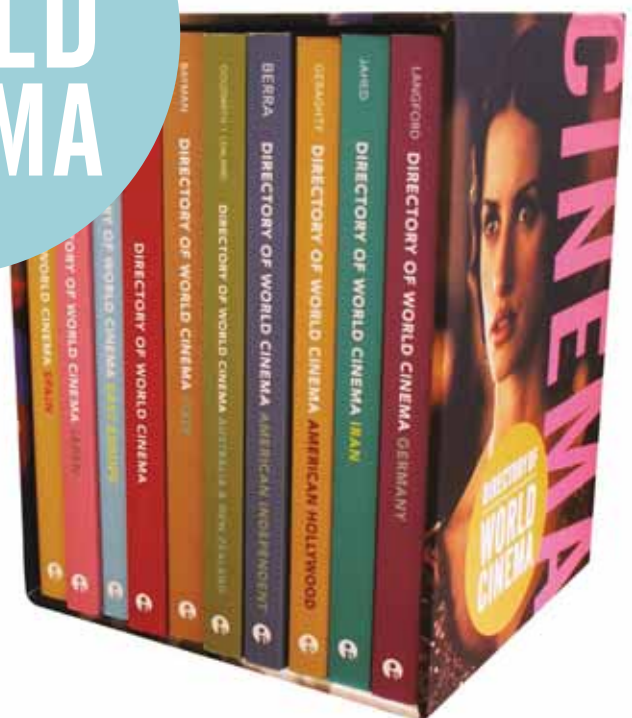
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REACH FOR THE SKY

Less celebrated than his contemporaries Jean Renoir and Marcel Carné, director Jean Grémillon helped define the 'poetic realism' of 1930s French cinema. It's time to rediscover his films

By Ginette Vincendeau



SYMPATHIQUE
Among French directors of his time Jean Grémillon, above, was exceptional for his depiction of the struggles of professional women in films such as 1944's *Le ciel est à vous*, opposite

Of all the great filmmakers of the golden age of French cinema, Jean Grémillon is the one who has most rapidly faded from view. Yet he is central to notions of realism within classical French cinema, in part for having contributed two poetic-realist masterpieces – *Lady Killer* (*Gueule d'amour*, 1937) and *Remorques* (*Stormy Waters*, 1941) – and in part for his extensive use of location shooting. This is far from his only claim to fame, as he also made two exceptional wartime films. The first, *Lumière d'été* (*Summer Light*, 1942), was considered by the film historian Georges Sadoul “a real film, the most authentic, perhaps the only one worthy of this name of all the French films produced during the German occupation”. The second, *Le ciel est à vous* (*The Woman Who Dared*, 1944), offered a rare portrait of a professional woman, as did his last feature *L'Amour d'une femme* (*The Love of a Woman*, 1954).

Despite this glowing record, Grémillon's films have been little seen since, and he has been marginalised in accounts of French film history. Even in France – with the exception of Geneviève Sellier's excellent monograph – he hasn't received the scholarly attention accorded to Jean Renoir or Marcel Carné, or even Julien Duvivier. While this brief article tries to understand his absence from the pantheon of great French filmmakers, along with the main features of his best-known work, it also briefly considers his post-war films, which have suffered even more neglect than his earlier ones.

Grémillon's biography and difficult career path offer clues to understanding his professional marginalisation. From a modest background, he was born in 1901 in Nor-

mandy. In 1920 he went to Paris to study music (against his father's wishes) and moved in avant-garde circles, making documentaries. One of these, *Un tour au large* (1926), impressed the stage actor Charles Dullin, who commissioned the young Grémillon to make his first – silent – fiction film *Maldone* (1928), in which Dullin stars as the son of a wealthy farmer who breaks away from his milieu, preferring a free life on the canals.

Grémillon's extraordinary first sound film *La Petite Lise* (1930) displeased both its producer Bernard Natan and the audience. Its failure was followed by the ‘scandal’ of *Dainah la métisse* (1932), a rare French film to star a mixed-race woman and a black man, which was censored and released in a butchered print. Grémillon accepted a few ‘commercial’ projects which he later disowned, and went to Spain to make a successful musical melodrama, *La dolorosa* (1934). He then started a long professional friendship with the producer Raoul Ploquin, who worked in Berlin, so it was in studios there that Grémillon shot *La Valse royale* in 1936 (a French version of a German film) and finally his first hit *Lady Killer*, followed by *The Strange Monsieur Victor* (*L'Etrange Monsieur Victor*, 1938).

The shooting of his next project *Remorques* was delayed by the outbreak of World War II. The war years, however, turned out to be good for Grémillon, as he turned his hand to the much admired *Lumière d'été* and *Le ciel est à vous*. But the immediate post-war era proved difficult, as several projects about French history fell through. Grémillon had mixed success with *White Spats* (*Pattes blanches*, 1949), based on a script by the playwright Jean Anouilh; for André Bazin, Anouilh's







For Grémillon, realism lay in 'the harmonies, the unknown relations, between objects and beings'

script rarely rose to the level of the director's "rare mastery" of images "at once sensual and frozen". After minimal distribution of his groundbreaking *L'Amour d'une femme*, Grémillon was only able to make a few documentaries before his untimely death in 1959.

Several points emerge from this jagged trajectory. In many ways Grémillon's fate is typical of that of the artist struggling against the commercial laws of the market, the pioneer going against audience expectations in stylistic and thematic terms. As a result he made barely 15 feature films between the 1920s and the 1950s, several of which he disowned. His movements in the 1930s also meant that he was out of synch with his contemporaries: his Spanish success *La dolorosa* was unknown in France, and in the pre-war years when Renoir, Carné and Duvivier were making films that directly engaged with France's Popular Front, Grémillon was working in Germany – for which he was criticised. Although he reconnected with France by joining the Resistance during the German occupation, post-war difficulties took their toll professionally as well as personally (according to several accounts, his disillusion drove him to drink). Yet against the odds, he made several films of exceptional originality and modernity.

OBJECTS AND BEINGS

For Grémillon, as he put it in 1953, "The grandeur, the meaning, the significance of French cinema are finely and profoundly rooted in realism." Realism for him did not mean simply surface naturalism, but "the discovery of that subtlety which the human eye does not perceive directly but which must be shown by establishing the harmonies, the unknown relations, between objects and beings". While realism (as this definition shows) is a difficult concept to pin down, Grémillon's importance for French realism takes two interrelated forms: his use of location shooting and his contribution to poetic realism.

Despite its poor performance in 1930, *La Petite Lise* in this respect remains a landmark. The film's artful privileging of atmosphere over plot perhaps explains its bad reception. Yet for the American film theorist Dudley Andrew it's precisely this quality that makes it one of the two most significant films in the development of a French tradition of (art) sound cinema, "darkly prophetic" in particular of the development of poetic realism.



As its name indicates, poetic realism brings together two apparently opposed values; it signifies a cinema that is both lyrical and realist. Grémillon's work differs from other poetic-realist filmmakers, such as Renoir with *La Bête humaine* (1938) and Carné with *Le Quai des brumes* (1938) and *Le Jour se lève* (1939). He places less emphasis on fatalism and makes greater use of location shooting – as opposed to the evocative sets used by Carné, for example. Nevertheless *La Petite Lise*, *Lady Killer*, *The Strange Monsieur Victor*, *Remorques*, *Lumière d'été* and *Le ciel est à vous* all bring together a sense of authenticity with the lyricism of stunningly beautiful images, in particular in their use of contrasted lighting.

Grémillon's overarching concern with realism is also manifest in his films' concentration on working-class backgrounds and characters. Thus in *La Petite Lise* we follow a convict, thieves and a prostitute. *The Strange Monsieur Victor* grounds its melodramatic narrative within a vividly depicted Toulon. Enhanced by Jean Gabin's star persona, *Lady Killer* and *Remorques* are superlative depictions of proletarian heroes: in the former he is a typesetter, in the latter he helms a small tugboat. If the characters in Grémillon's later films have more middle-class occupations (piano teacher, artist, aviatrix, doctor), the complex realities of their professional lives are shown with an unflinching gaze.

Equally significantly, many Grémillon films follow poetic-realist concerns in complicating the drama of the male protagonist. Like the male heroes of film noir which they prefigure, these are alienated characters suffering from what we would now call a 'crisis of masculinity'. Monsieur Victor (played by the great Raimu) is literally a split character (respectable shopkeeper by day and thief by night). The Gabin character in *Remorques* is torn between his work and romantic commitments – signified, as in *Maldone*, by a choice between two women. *Lumière d'été* features a tortured male artist struggling with fear of failure and commercial imperatives – who is rightly seen by Geneviève Sellier as an echo of the director's own position.

Nowhere is the drama of the male protagonist more vivid, however, than in *Lady Killer*. In this, his first major success, Grémillon harnesses the considerable star power of Gabin (who had just made *Pépé le Moko* and *La Grande Illusion*) to deconstruct the power of seduction.

Gabin plays Lucien, a handsome and much loved cavalry officer in the southern city of Orange, whose fate changes when he falls in love with Madeleine (Mireille Balin), a glamorous kept woman. Demobbed and working in Paris as a modest typesetter, Lucien is devastated by the realisation that Madeleine will not leave her sugar daddy; utterly ruined, he moves back to the south. But later he is drawn back to her, with fatal consequences.

A perfect vehicle for Gabin, *Lady Killer* deploys to the full the dualities of his star persona, as proletarian hero and criminal, virile and 'feminine', the driving force of the narrative yet also the object of the camera's gaze. This is especially the case at the beginning of the film when, attired in the ostentatiously exotic uniform of the Spahis (the French-Algerian cavalry), he is the overt object of desire of all the women around. When he meets Madeleine at the casino, bejewelled in an evening gown, the equivalence between the two beautiful creatures is emphasised. But in trying to conquer his double, Lucien is brought to ruin; out of uniform he is nothing, as Grémillon demonstrates the shallow nature of seduction.

There is arguably another dimension to the tale, as the heterosexual couple of Lucien and Madeleine is replaced by a male couple: Lucien and René, the friend whose seduction by Madeleine inspires Lucien's jealousy – and who ultimately helps him escape. The last scene of the film emphasises the solidarity and tenderness between the two male friends. In one sense, this is similar to other Gabin films of the 1930s and beyond, where male friendship offers a refuge from scheming women. In *Lady Killer*, however, the closeness between the two men is shown to be more intimate; the French writer Eve Stehlin has even argued that the film suggests a homosexual relationship as a viable alternative to the heterosexual couple. But while this film's celebration of male friendship depends on a misogynist demonisation of the female character, Grémillon's later films would show him continuing to undermine conventional gender relations through empowering portraits of women.

A FEMINIST DIRECTOR?

Two films alone would be enough to set Grémillon apart from his contemporaries in the pre-New Wave, pre-feminist era: *Le ciel est à vous* and *L'Amour d'une femme*. Both show the struggles of professional women against the conventional expectations of society, as well as in relation to their romantic life. More importantly, they do so with realism and sympathy – and from the women's points of view. *Le ciel est à vous* is the story of Thérèse (Madeleine Renaud), a young woman in provincial France who – with the help of her husband Pierre (Charles Vanel) – drops everything to pursue an aviation record for solo flying. While her heroism is celebrated, she is also criticised, and yet throughout she is supported by Pierre. Despite a happy ending, Grémillon shows the complexity of the couple's relationship, both with each other and with their environment. It was made during the German occupation, and historians disagree on the film's position vis-à-vis Vichy ideology: glorification of the French woman or anti-Vichy film (for instance, in not venerating motherhood)? Yet it is typical of the cinema of the period in placing a woman in a leading role. In choosing Madeleine Renaud (in her fourth film for him), Grémillon also exalts a beautiful but modest feminine

type, far removed from the femmes fatales played by Balin or Viviane Romance in his previous films.

If *Le ciel est à vous* follows the cinema of the Occupation in giving a woman pride of place, in the harsher post-war period, which saw something of a misogynist backlash against women, *L'Amour d'une femme* was an even more courageous and unusual film. Shot on location in Ushant off the coast of Brittany, it's the story of Marie (Micheline Presle), who in order to establish herself as a doctor has to fight the prejudice not only of the locals but also of her lover, an Italian engineer played by Massimo Girotti. Here again Grémillon is unflinching in showing the contradictions of a complex situation – for instance using a sympathetic older woman, the local schoolteacher (Gaby Morlay), as a foil to Marie. But it is his construction of her subjectivity that marks him apart from his contemporaries. When eventually, having proved herself to the locals, she gives up her lover, this is presented not as an inevitable choice (a woman being punished for wanting to have it all), but as a result of his prejudice.

Unsurprisingly, *L'Amour d'une femme* shocked viewers at the time. It was denied a proper release and only *Cahiers du cinéma* saluted its quality. But even today, the film is striking in its progressive vision of a career woman. While it's beginning to be reappraised – and others like *Maldone*, *La Petite Lise*, *Lady Killer*, *Remorques*, *Lumière d'été* and *Le ciel est à vous* have long had their supporters – it's high time for Grémillon's entire output to be seen and examined in detail, including the films the director himself dismissed.

Unlike the vast majority of French filmmakers who focus on Paris, Grémillon displayed a rich panorama of provincial France; contrary to the construction of 'reality' in sets, he preferred to shoot – magnificently – on location. His analysis and deconstruction of gender roles, both male and female, were unparalleled in the cinema of the classical era. If this pioneering spirit cost him dearly in personal and professional terms, we can only agree with Geneviève Sellier that his oeuvre displays "an extraordinary coherence and astonishing modernity".

i A Grémillon retrospective plays at BFI Southbank, London until 30 July



DISRUPTIVE PASSIONS
Clockwise from far left:
The Strange Monsieur Victor,
La Petite Lise, Mireille Balin
and Jean Gabin in *Lady Killer*

THE ESSAY FILM



In recent years the essay film has attained widespread recognition as a particular category of film practice, with its own history and canonical figures and texts. In advance of a major season throughout August at London's BFI Southbank, *Sight & Sound* explores the characteristics that have come to define this most elastic of forms and looks in detail at a dozen influential milestone essay films, from Jean Vigo to Chris Marker. **By Andrew Tracy**

I recently had a heated argument with a cinephile filmmaking friend about Chris Marker's *Sans soleil* (1983). Having recently completed her first feature, and with such matters on her mind, my friend contended that the film's power lay in its combinations of image and sound, irrespective of Marker's inimitable voiceover narration. "Do you think that people who can't understand English or French will get nothing out of the film?" she said; to which I – hot under the collar – replied that they might very well get something, but that something would not be the complete work.

To take this film-lovers' tiff to a more elevated plane, what it suggests is that the essentialist conception of cinema is still present in cinephilic and critical culture, as are the difficulties of containing within it works that disrupt its very fabric. Ever since Vachel Lindsay published *The Art of the Moving Picture* in 1915 the quest to secure the autonomy of film as both medium and art – that ever-elusive 'pure cinema' – has been a preoccupation of film scholars, critics, cinephiles and filmmakers alike. My friend's implicit derogation of the irreducible literary element of *Sans soleil* and her neo-Godardian invocation of 'image and sound' touch on that strain of this phenomenon which finds, in the technical-functional combination of those two elements, an alchemical, if not transubstantial, result.

Mechanically created, cinema defies mechanism: it is poetic, transportive and, if not irrational, then arational. This mystically-minded view has a long and illustrious tradition in film history, stretching from the sense-deranging surrealists – who famously found accidental poetry in the juxtapositions created by randomly walking into and out of films; to the surrealist-influenced, scientifically trained and ontologically minded André Bazin, whose realist veneration of the long take centred on the very preternaturalness of nature as revealed by the unblinking gaze of the camera; to the trash-bin idolatry of the American underground, weaving new cinematic mythologies from Hollywood detritus; and to auteurism itself, which (in its more simplistic iterations) sees

the essence of the filmmaker inscribed even upon the most compromised of works.

It isn't going too far to claim that this tradition has constituted the foundation of cinephilic culture and helped to shape the cinematic canon itself. If Marker has now been welcomed into that canon and – thanks to the far greater availability of his work – into the mainstream of (primarily DVD-educated) cinephilia, it is rarely acknowledged how much of that work cheerfully undercuts many of the long-held assumptions and pieties upon which it is built. In his review of *Letter from Siberia* (1957), Bazin placed Marker at right angles to cinema proper, describing the film's "primary material" as intelligence – specifically a "verbal intelligence" – rather than image. He dubbed Marker's method a "horizontal" montage, "as opposed to traditional montage that plays with the sense of duration through the relationship of shot to shot".

Here, claimed Bazin, "a given image doesn't refer to the one that preceded it or the one

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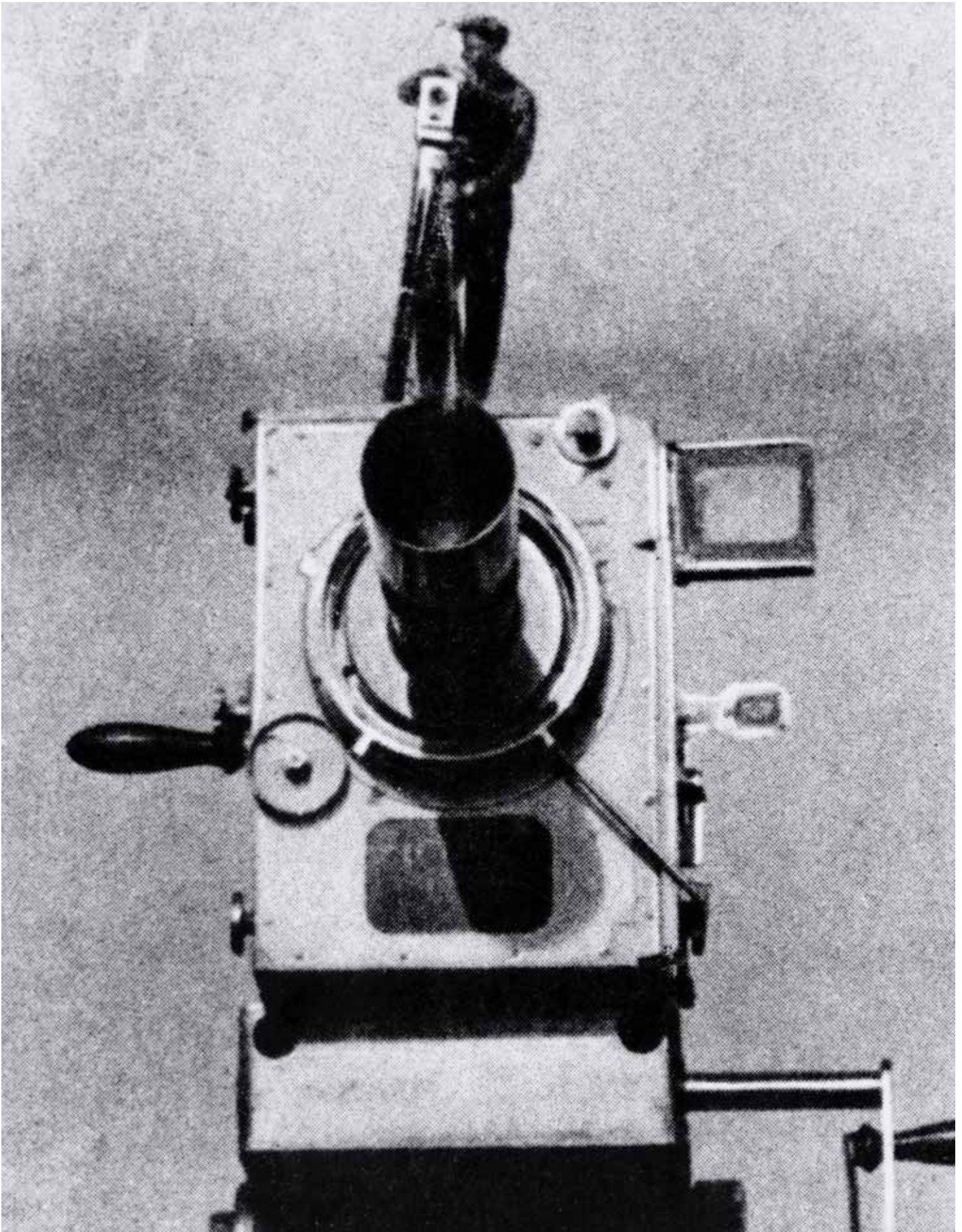
Histoire(s) de cinéma

that will follow, but rather it refers laterally, in some way, to what is said." Thus the very thing which makes *Letter* "extraordinary", in Bazin's estimation, is also what makes it not-cinema. Looking for a term to describe it, Bazin hit upon a prophetic turn of phrase, writing that Marker's film is, "to borrow Jean Vigo's formulation of *A propos de Nice* ('a documentary point of view'), an essay documented by film. The important word is 'essay', understood in the same sense that it has in literature – an essay at once historical and political, written by a poet as well."

Marker's canonisation has proceeded apace with that of the form of which he has become the exemplar. Whether used as critical/curatorial shorthand in reviews and programme notes, employed as a model by filmmakers or examined in theoretical depth in major retrospectives (this summer's BFI Southbank programme, for instance, follows upon Andréa Picard's two-part series 'The Way of the Termite' at TIFF Cinematheque in 2009-2010, which drew inspiration from Jean-Pierre Gorin's groundbreaking programme of the same title at Vienna Filmmuseum in 2007), the 'essay film' has attained in recent years widespread recognition as a particular, if perennially porous, mode of film practice. An appealingly simple formulation, the term has proved both taxonomically useful and remarkably elastic, allowing one to define a field of previously inassimilable objects while ranging far and wide throughout film history to claim other previously identified objects for this invented tradition.

It is crucial to note that the 'essay film' is not only a post-facto appellation for a kind of film practice that had not bothered to mark itself with a moniker, but also an invention and an intervention. While it has acquired its own set of canonical 'texts' that include the collected works of Marker, much of Godard – from the missive (the 52-minute *Letter to Jane*, 1972) to the massive (*Histoire(s) de cinéma*, 1988-98) – Welles's *F for Fake* (1973) and Thom Andersen's *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (2003), it has also poached on the territory of other, 'sovereign' forms,





expanding its purview in accordance with the whims of its missionaries. From documentary especially, Vigo's aforementioned *A propos de Nice*, Ivens's *Rain* (1929), Buñuel's sardonic *Las hurdes* (1933), Resnais's *Night and Fog* (1955), Rouch and Morin's *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961); from the avant garde, Akerman's *Je, Tu, Il, Elle* (1974), Straub/Huillet's *Trop tôt, trop tard* (1982); from agitprop, Getino and Solanas's *The Hour of the Furnaces* (1968), Portabella's *Informe general...* (1976); and even from 'pure' fiction, for example Gorin's provocative selection of Griffith's *A Corner in Wheat* (1909).

Just as within itself the essay film presents, in the words of Gorin, "the meandering of an intelligence that tries to multiply the entries and the exits into the material it has elected (or by which it has been elected)," so, without, its scope expands exponentially through the industrious activity of its adherents, blithely cutting across definitional borders and – as per the Manny Farberian concept which gave Gorin's 'Termite' series its name – creating meaning precisely by eating away at its own boundaries. In the scope of its application and its association more with an (amorphous) sensibility as opposed to fixed rules, the essay film bears similarities to the most famous of all fabricated genres: film noir, which has been located both in its natural habitat of the crime thriller as well as in such disparate climates as melodramas, westerns and science fiction. The essay film, however, has proved even more peripatetic: where noir was formulated from the films of a determinate historical period (no matter that the temporal goalposts are continually shifted), the essay film is resolutely unfixed in time; it has its choice of forebears. And while noir, despite its occasional shadings over into semi-documentary during the 1940s, remains bound to fictional narratives, the essay film moves blithely between the realms of fiction and non-fiction, complicating the terms of both. "Here is a form that seems to accommodate the two sides of that divide at the same time, that can navigate from documentary to fiction and back, creating other polarities in the process between which it can operate," writes Gorin. When Orson Welles, in the closing moments of his masterful meditation on authenticity and illusion *F for Fake*, chortles, "I did promise that for one hour, I'd tell you only the truth. For the past 17 minutes, I've been lying my head off," he is expressing both the conjuror's pleasure in a trick well played and the artist's delight in a self-defined mode that is cheerfully impure in both form and, perhaps, intention.

Nevertheless, as the essay film merrily traipses through celluloid history it intersects with 'pure cinema' at many turns and its form as such owes much to one particularly prominent variety thereof.

THE MONTAGE TRADITION

If the mystical strain described above represents the Dionysian side of pure cinema, Soviet montage was its Apollonian opposite: randomness, revelation and sensuous response countered by construction, forceful argumentation and didactic instruction. No less than the mystics, however, the montagists were after essences. Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov



Streets of fire: *The Hour of the Furnaces* captures the opening salvo in Argentina's 'dirty war'

and Pudovkin, along with their transnational associates and acolytes, sought to crystallise abstract concepts in the direct and purposeful juxtaposition of forceful, hard-edged images – the general made powerfully, viscerally immediate in the particular. Here, says Eisenstein, in the umbrella-wielding harpies who set upon the revolutionaries in *October* (1928), is bourgeois Reaction made manifest; here, in the serried ranks of soldiers proceeding as one down the Odessa Steps in *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), is Oppression undisguised; here, in the condemned Potemkin sailor who wins over his imminent executioners with a cry of "Brothers!" – a moment powerfully invoked by Marker at the beginning of his magnum opus *A Grain Without a Cat* (1977) – is Solidarity emergent and, from it, the seeds of Revolution.

The relentlessly unidirectional focus of classical Soviet montage puts it methodologically and temperamentally at odds with the ruminative, digressive and playful qualities we associate with the essay film. So, too, the former's fierce ideological certainty and cadre spirit contrast with that free play of the mind, the Montaigne-inspired meanderings of individual intelligence, that so characterise our image of the latter. Beyond Marker's personal interest in and inheritance from the Soviet masters, classical montage laid the foundations of the essay film most pertinently in its foregrounding of the presence, within the fabric of the film, of a directing intelligence. Conducting their experiments in film not through 'pure' abstraction but through narrative, the montagists made manifest at least two operative levels within

Welles's masterful meditation on authenticity and illusion expresses the conjuror's pleasure in a trick well played

the film: the narrative itself and the arrangement of that narrative by which the deeper structures that move it are made legible. Against the seamless, immersive illusionism of commercial cinema, montage was a key for decrypting those social forces, both overt and hidden, that govern human society. And as such it was method rather than material that was the pathway to truth. Fidelity to the authentic – whether the accurate representation of historical events or the documentary flavouring of Eisensteinian typage – was important only inasmuch as it provided the filmmaker with another tool to reach a considerably higher plane of reality.

Midway on their Marxian mission to change the world rather than interpret it, the montagists actively made the world even as they revealed it. In doing so they powerfully expressed the dialectic between control and chaos that would come to be not only one of the chief motors of the essay film but the crux of modernity itself. Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), now claimed as the most venerable and venerated ancestor of the essay film (and this despite its prototypically purist claim to realise a 'universal' cinematic language "based on its complete separation from the language of literature and the theatre") is the archetypal model of this high-modernist agon. While it is the turning of the movie projector itself and the penetrating gaze of Vertov's kino-eye that sets the whirling dynamo of the city into motion, the recorder creating that which it records, that motion is also outside its control.

At the dawn of the cinematic century, the American writer Henry Adams saw in the dynamo both the expression of human mastery over nature and a conduit to mysterious, elemental powers beyond our comprehension. So, too, the modernist ambition expressed in literature, painting, architecture and cinema to capture a subject from all angles – to exhaust its wealth of surfaces, meanings, implications, resonances

– collides with awe (or fear) before a plenitude that can never be encompassed. Remove the high-modernist sense of mission and we can see this same dynamic as animating the essay film – recall that last, parenthetical term in Gorin’s formulation of the essay film, “multiply[ing] the entries and the exits into the material it has elected (or by which it has been elected)”. The nimble movements and multi-angled perspectives of the essay film are founded on this negotiation between active choice and passive possession; on the recognition that even the keenest insight pales in the face of an ultimate unknowability.

The other key inheritance the essay film received from the classical montage tradition, perhaps inevitably, was a progressive spirit, however variously defined. While Leni Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will* (1935) and *Olympia* (1938) amply and chillingly demonstrated that montage, like any instrumental apparatus, has no inherent ideological nature, hers were more the exceptions that proved the rule. (Though why, apart from ideological repulsiveness, should Riefenstahl’s plentifully fabricated ‘documentaries’ not be considered as essay films in their own right?) The overwhelming fact remains that the great majority of those who drew upon the Soviet montagists for explicitly ideological ends (as opposed to Hollywood’s opportunistic swappings) resided on the left of the spectrum – and, in the montagists’ most notable successor in the period immediately following, retained their alignment with and inextricability from the state.

PROGRESSIVE VS RADICAL

The Griersonian documentary movement in Britain neutered the political and aesthetic radicalism of its more dynamic model in favour of paternalistic progressivism founded on conformity, class complacency and snobbery towards its own medium. But if it offered a far



Je, Tu, Il, Elle

paler antecedent to the essay film than the Soviet montage tradition, it nevertheless represents an important stage in the evolution of the essay-film form, for reasons not unrelated to some of those rather staid qualities. The Soviet montagists had created a vision of modernity racing into the future at pace with the social and spiritual liberation of its proletarian pilot-passenger, an aggressively public ideology of group solidarity. The Grierson school, by contrast, offered a domesticated image of an efficient, rational and productive modern industrial society based on interconnected but separate public and private spheres, as per the ideological values of middle-class liberal individualism. The Soviet montagists had looked to forge a universal, ‘pure’ cinematic language, at least before the oppressive dictates of Stalinist socialist realism shackled them. The Grierson school, evincing a middle-class disdain for the popular and ‘low’ arts, sought instead to purify the sullied medium of cinema by importing extra-cinematic prestige: most notably *Night Mail* (1936), with its Auden-penned, Britten-scored ode to the magic of the mail, or Humphrey Jennings’s salute to wartime solidarity *A Diary for Timothy* (1945), with its



Chronicle of a Summer

mildly sententious E.M. Forster narration.

What this domesticated dynamism and retrograde pursuit of high-cultural bona fides achieved, however, was to mingle a newfound cinematic language (montage) with a traditionally literary one (narration); and, despite the salutes to state-oriented communality, to re-introduce the individual, idiosyncratic voice as the vehicle of meaning – as the mediating intelligence that connects the viewer to the images viewed. In *Night Mail* especially there is, in the whimsy of the Auden text and the film’s synchronisation of private time and public history, an intimation of the essay film’s musing, reflective voice as the chugging rhythm of the narration timed to the speeding wheels of the train gives way to a nocturnal vision of solitary dreamers bedevilled by spectral monsters, awakening in expectation of the postman’s knock with a “quicken[ing] of the heart/for who can bear to be forgot?” It’s a curiously disquieting conclusion: this unsettling, anxious vision of disappearance that takes on an even darker shade with the looming spectre of war – one that rhymes, five decades on, with the wistful search of Marker’s narrator in *Sans soleil*, seeking those fleeting images which “quicken the heart” in a world where wars both past and present have been forgotten, subsumed in a modern society built upon the systematic banishment of memory.

It is, of course, with the seminal post-war collaborations between Marker and Alain Resnais that the essay film proper emerges. In contrast to the striving culture-snobbery of the Griersonian documentary, the Resnais-Marker collaborations (and the Resnais solo documentary shorts that preceded them) inaugurate a blithe, seemingly effortless dialogue between cinema and the other arts in both their subjects (painting, sculpture) and their assorted creative personnel (writers Paul Eluard, Jean Cayrol, Raymond Queneau, composers Darius Milhaud and Hanns Eisler). This also marks the point where the revolutionary line of the Soviets and the soft, statist liberalism of the British documentarians give way to a more free-floating but staunchly oppositional leftism, one derived as much from a spirit of humanistic inquiry as from ideological affiliation.

Related to this was the form’s problems with official patronage. Originally conceived as commissions by various French government or government-affiliated bodies, the Resnais-Marker films famously ran into trouble from French censors: *Les statues meurent aussi*



The land that time forgot: Luis Buñuel's Las Hurdes

◀ (1953) for its condemnation of French colonialism, *Night and Fog* for its shots of Vichy policemen guarding deportation camps; the former film would have its second half lopped off before being cleared for screening, the latter its offending shots removed.

Appropriately, it is at this moment that the emphasis of the essay film begins to shift away from tactile presence – the whirl of the city, the rhythm of the rain, the workings of industry – to felt absence. The montagists had marvelled at the workings of human creations which raced ahead irrespective of human efforts; here, the systems created by humanity to master the world write, in their very functioning, an epitaph for those things extinguished in the act of mastering them. The African masks preserved in the Musée de l'Homme in *Les statues meurent aussi* speak of a bloody legacy of vanquished and conquered civilisations; the labyrinthine archival complex of the Bibliothèque Nationale in the sardonically titled *Toute la mémoire du monde* (1956) sparks a disquisition on all that is forgotten in the act of cataloguing knowledge; the miracle of modern plastics saluted in the witty, industrially commissioned *Le Chant du styrene* (1958) regresses backwards to its homely beginnings; in *Night and Fog* an unprecedentedly enormous effort of human organisation marshals itself to actively produce a dreadful, previously unimaginable nullity.

To overstate the case, loss is the primary motor of the modern essay film: loss of belief in the image's ability to faithfully reflect reality; loss of faith in the cinema's ability to capture life as it is lived; loss of illusions about cinema's 'purity', its autonomy from the other arts or, for that matter, the world. "You never know what you may be filming," notes one of Marker's narrating surrogates in *A Grain Without a Cat*, as footage of the Chilean equestrian



Night Mail

team at the 1952 Helsinki Olympics offers a glimpse of a future member of the Pinochet junta. The image and sound captured at the time of filming offer one facet of reality; it is only with this lateral move outside that reality that the future reality it conceals can speak.

What will distinguish the essay film, as Bazin noted, is not only its ability to make the image but also its ability to interrogate it, to dispel the illusion of its sovereignty and see it as part of a matrix of meaning that extends beyond the screen. No less than were the montagists, the film-essayists seek the motive forces of modern society not by crystallising eternal verities in powerful images but by investigating that ever-shifting, kaleidoscopic relationship between our regime of images and the realities it both reveals and occludes.

Loss is the primary motor of the modern essay film: loss of belief in the image's ability to faithfully reflect reality



Night and Fog

1 *A propos de Nice* (Jean Vigo, 1930)

Few documentaries have achieved the cult status of the 22-minute *A propos de Nice*, co-directed by Jean Vigo and cameraman Boris Kaufman at the beginning of their careers. The film retains a spontaneous, apparently haphazard, quality yet its careful montage combines a strong realist drive, lyrical dashes – helped by Marc Perrone's accordion music – and a clear political agenda. In today's era, in which the Côte d'Azur has become a byword for hedonistic consumption, it's refreshing to see a film that systematically undermines its glossy surface. Using images sometimes 'stolen' with hidden cameras, *A propos de Nice* moves between the city's main sites of pleasure: the Casino, the Promenade des Anglais, the Hotel Negresco and the carnival. Occasionally the filmmakers remind us of the sea, the birds, the wind in the trees but mostly they contrast people: the rich play tennis, the poor *boules*; the rich have tea, the poor gamble in the (then) squalid streets of the Old Town. As often, women bear the brunt of any critique of bourgeois consumption: a rich old woman's head is compared to an ostrich, others grin as they gaze up at phallic factory chimneys; young women dance frenetically, their crotch to the camera. In the film's most famous image, an elegant woman is 'stripped' by the camera to reveal her naked body – not quite matched by a man's shoes vanishing to display his naked feet to the shoe-shine. An essay film *avant la lettre*, *A propos de Nice* ends on Soviet-style workers' faces and burning furnaces. The message is clear, even if it has not been heeded by history. **Ginette Vincendeau**

2 *A Diary for Timothy* (Humphrey Jennings, 1945)

A Diary for Timothy takes the form of a journal addressed to the eponymous Timothy James Jenkins, born on 3 September 1944, exactly five years after Britain's entry into World War II. The narrator, Michael Redgrave, a benevolent offscreen presence, informs young Timothy about the momentous events since his birth and later advises that, even when the war is over, there will be "everyday danger". The subjectivity and speculative approach maintained throughout are more akin to the essay tradition than traditional propaganda in their rejection of mere glib conveyance of information or thunderous hectoring. Instead Jennings invites us quietly to observe the nuances of everyday life as Britain enters the final chapter of the war. **Aganist**



Naked jape: technical trickery and political critique combine in Vigo's A propos de Nice

the momentous political backdrop, otherwise routine, everyday activities are ascribed new profundity as the Welsh miner Geronwy, Alan the farmer, Bill the railway engineer and Peter the convalescent fighter pilot go about their daily business. Within the confines of the Ministry of Information's remit – to lift the spirits of a battle-weary nation – and the loose narrative framework of Timothy's first six months, Jennings finds ample expression for the kind of formal experiment that sets his work apart from that of other contemporary documentarians. He worked across film, painting, photography, theatrical design, journalism and poetry; in *Diary* his protean spirit finds expression in a manner that transgresses the conventional parameters of wartime propaganda, stretching into film poem, philosophical reflection, social document, surrealist ethnographic observation and impressionistic symphony. Managing to keep to the right side of sentimentality, it still makes for potent viewing. **Catherine McGahan**

3 **Toute la mémoire du monde**

(Alain Resnais, 1956)

In the opening credits of *Toute la mémoire du monde*, alongside the director's name and that of producer Pierre Brauberg, one reads the mysterious designation "Groupe des XXX". This Group of Thirty was an assembly of filmmakers who mobilised in the early 1950s to defend the "style, quality and ambitious subject matter" of short films in post-war France; the signatories of its 1953 'Declaration' included Resnais, Chris Marker and Agnès Varda. The success of the campaign contributed to a golden age of short filmmaking that would last a decade and form the crucible of the French essay film.

A 22-minute poetic documentary about the old French Bibliothèque Nationale, *Toute la mémoire du monde* is a key work in this strand of filmmaking and one which can also be seen as part of a loose 'trilogy of memory' in Resnais's early documentaries. *Les statues meurent aussi* (co-directed with Chris Marker) explored cultural memory as embodied in African art and the depredations of colonialism; *Night and Fog* was a seminal reckoning with the historical memory of the Nazi death camps. While less politically controversial than these earlier works, *Toute la mémoire du monde*'s depiction of the Bibliothèque nationale is still oddly suggestive of a prison, with its uniformed guards and endless corridors. In W.G. Sebald's 2001 novel *Austerlitz*, directly after a passage dedicated to Resnais's film, the protagonist describes his uncertainty over whether, when using the library, he "was on the Islands of the Blest, or, on the contrary, in a penal colony".

Resnais explores the workings of the library through the effective device of following a book from arrival and cataloguing to its delivery to a reader (the book itself being something of an in-joke: a mocked-up travel guide to Mars in the *Petite Planète* series Marker was then editing for Editions du Seuil). With Resnais's probing, mobile camerawork and a commentary by French writer Remo Forlani, *Toute la mémoire du monde* transforms the library into a mysterious labyrinth, something between an edifice and an organism: part brain and part tomb. **Chris Darke**



Hope and glory: Humphrey Jennings's *A Diary for Timothy*

4 **The House Is Black (Kaneh siah ast)**

(Forough Farrokhzad, 1963)

Before the House of Makhmalbaf there was *The House Is Black*. Called "the greatest of all Iranian films" by critic Jonathan Rosenbaum, who helped translate the subtitles from Farsi into English, this 20-minute black-and-white essay film by feminist poet Farrokhzad was shot in a leper colony near Tabriz in northern Iran and has been heralded as the touchstone of the Iranian New Wave. The buildings of the Baba Baghi colony are brick and peeling whitewash but a student asked to write a sentence using the word 'house' offers *kaneh siah ast*: the house is black. His hand, seen in close-up, is one of many in the film; rather than objects of medical curiosity, these hands – some fingerless, many distorted by the disease – are agents, always in movement, doing, making, exercising, praying. In putting white words on the blackboard, the student makes part of the film; in the next shots, the film's credits appear, similarly handwritten on the same blackboard.

As they negotiate the camera's gaze and provide the soundtrack by singing, stamping and

wheeling a barrow, the lepers are co-authors of the film. Farrokhzad echoes their prayers, heard and seen on screen, with her voiceover, which collages religious texts, beginning with the passage from Psalm 55 famously set to music by Mendelssohn ("O for the wings of a dove"). In the conjunctions between Farrokhzad's poetic narration and diegetic sound, including tanbur-playing, an intense assonance arises. Its beat is provided by uniquely lyrical associative editing that would influence Abbas Kiarostami, who quotes Farrokhzad's poem 'The Wind Will Carry Us' in his eponymous film. Repeated shots of familiar bodily movement, made musical, move the film insistently into the viewer's body: it is infectious. Posing a question of aesthetics, *The House Is Black* uses the contagious gaze of cinema to dissolve the screen between Us and Them. **Sophie Mayer**

5 **Letter to Jane: An Investigation About a Still**

(Jean-Luc Godard & Jean-Pierre Gorin, 1972)

With its invocation of Brecht ("Uncle Bertolt"), rejection of visual pleasure (for 52 minutes we're mostly looking at a single black-



Toute la mémoire du monde



The House Is Black

and-white still) and discussion of the role of intellectuals in “the revolution”, *Letter to Jane* is so much of its time as to appear untranslatable to the present except as a curio from a distant era of radical cinema. Between 1969 and 1971, Godard and Gorin made films collectively as part of the Dziga Vertov Group before they returned, in 1972, to the mainstream with *Tout va bien*, a big-budget film about the aftermath of May 1968 featuring leftist stars Yves Montand and Jane Fonda. It was to the latter that Godard and Gorin directed their *Letter* after seeing a news photograph of her on a solidarity visit to North Vietnam in August 1972.

Intended to accompany the US release of *Tout va bien*, *Letter to Jane* is ‘a letter’ only in as much as it is fairly conversational in tone, with Godard and Gorin delivering their voiceovers in English. It’s stylistically more akin to the ‘blackboard films’ of the time, with their combination of pedagogical instruction and stern auto-critique. It’s also an inspired semiological reading of a media image and a reckoning with the contradictions of celebrity activism. Godard and Gorin examine the image’s framing and camera angle and ask why Fonda is the ‘star’ of the photograph while the Vietnamese themselves remain faceless or out of focus? And what of her expression of compassionate concern? This “expression of an expression” they trace back, via an elaboration of the Kuleshov effect, through other famous faces – Henry Fonda, John Wayne, Lillian Gish and Falconetti – concluding that it allows for “no reverse shot” and serves only to bolster Western “good conscience”. *Letter to Jane* is ultimately concerned with the same question that troubled philosophers such as Levinas and Derrida: what’s at stake ethically when one claims to speak “in place of the other”? Any contemporary critique of celebrity activism – from Bono and Geldof to Angelina Jolie – should start here, with a pair of *gauchiste* trolls muttering darkly beneath a press shot of ‘Hanoi Jane’. **Chris Darke**

Any contemporary critique of celebrity activism should start here, with a pair of *gauchiste* trolls and a press shot of ‘Hanoi Jane’

6 *F for Fake* (Orson Welles, 1973)

Those who insist it was all downhill for Orson Welles after *Citizen Kane* would do well to take a close look at this film made more than three decades later, in its own idiosyncratic way a masterpiece just as innovative as his better-known feature debut. Perhaps the film’s comparative and undeserved critical neglect is due to its predominantly playful tone, or perhaps it’s because it is a low-budget, hard-to-categorise, deeply personal work that mixes original material with plenty of footage filmed by others – most extensively taken from a documentary by François Reichenbach about Clifford Irving and his bogus biography of his friend Elmyr de Hory, an art forger who claimed to have painted pictures attributed to famous names and hung in the world’s most prestigious galleries.

If the film had simply offered an account of the hoaxes perpetrated by that disreputable duo, it would have been entertaining enough but, by means of some extremely inventive, innovative and inspired editing, Welles broadens his study of fakery to take in his own history as a ‘charlatan’ – not merely his lifelong penchant for magician’s tricks but also the 1938 radio broadcast of his news-report adaptation of H.G. Wells’s *The War of the Worlds* – as well as observations on Howard Hughes, Pablo Picasso and the anonymous builders of Chartres cathedral. So it is that Welles contrives to conjure up, behind a colourful cloak of consistently entertaining mischief, a rueful meditation on truth and falsehood, art and authorship – a

subject presumably dear to his heart following Pauline Kael’s then recent attempts to persuade the world that Herman J. Mankiewicz had been the real creative force behind *Kane*. As a riposte to that thesis (albeit never framed as such), *F for Fake* is subtle, robust, supremely erudite and never once bitter; the darkest moment – as Welles contemplates the serene magnificence of Chartres – is at once an uncharacteristic but touchingly heartfelt display of humility and a poignant *memento mori*. And it is in this delicate balancing of the autobiographical with the universal, as well as in the dazzling deployment of cinematic form to illustrate and mirror content, that the film works its once unique, now highly influential magic. **Geoff Andrew**

7 *How to Live in the German Federal Republic* (Leben – BRD) (Harun Farocki, 1990)

Harun Farocki’s portrait of West Germany in 32 simulations from training sessions has no commentary, just the actions themselves in all their surreal beauty, one after the other. The Bundesrepublik Deutschland is shown as a nation of people who can deal with everything because they have been prepared – taught how to react properly in every possible situation. We know how birth works; how to behave in kindergarten; how to chat up girls, boys or whatever we fancy (for we’re liberal-minded, if only in principle); how to look for a job and maybe live without finding one; how to wiggle our arses in the hottest way possible when we pole-dance, or manage a hostage crisis without things getting (too) bloody. Whatever job we do, we know it by heart; we also know how to manage whatever kind of psychological breakdown we experience; and we are also prepared for the end, and even have an idea about how our burial will go. This is the nation: one of fearful people in dire need of control over their one chance of getting it right.

Viewed from the present, *How to Live in*



Don't look now: Godard and Gorin's masterful spearing of liberal activism in *Letter to Jane*



How to Live in the German Federal Republic



F for Fake

the German Federal Republic is revealed as the archetype of many a Farocki film in the decades to follow, for example *Die Umschulung* (1994), *Der Auftritt* (1996) or *Nicht ohne Risiko* (2004), all of which document as dispassionately as possible different – not necessarily simulated – scenarios of social interactions related to labour and capital. For all their enlightening beauty, none of these ever came close to *How to Live in the German Federal Republic* which, depending on one's mood, can play like an absurd comedy or the most gut-wrenching drama. Yet one disquieting thing is certain: *How to Live in the German Federal Republic* didn't age – our lives still look the same. **Olaf Möller**

8 One Man's War (La Guerre d'un seul homme) (Edgardo Cozarinsky, 1982)

One Man's War proves that an auteur film can be made without writing a line, recording a sound or shooting a single frame. It's easy to point to the 'extraordinary' character of the film, given its combination of materials that were not made to cohabit; there couldn't be a less plausible dialogue than the one Cozarinsky establishes between the newsreels shot during the Nazi occupation of Paris and the Parisian diaries of novelist and Nazi officer Ernst Jünger. There's some truth to Pascal Bonitzer's assertion in *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1982 that the principle of the documentary was inverted here, since it is the images that provide a commentary for the voice.

But that observation still doesn't pin down the uniqueness of a work that forces history through a series of registers, styles and dimensions, wiping out the distance between reality and subjectivity, propaganda and literature, cinema and journalism, daily life and dream, and establishing the idea not so much of communicating vessels as of contaminating vessels. To enquire about the essayistic dimension of *One Man's War* is to submit it to a test of purity against which the film itself is rebelling. This is no *ars combinatoria* but systems of collision and harmony; organic in their temporal development and experimental in their procedural eagerness. It's like a machine created to die instantly; neither Cozarinsky nor anyone else could repeat the trick, as is the case with all great avant-garde works. By blurring the genre of his literary essays, his fictional films, his archival documentaries, his literary fictions, Cozarinsky showed he knew how to reinvent the erasure of borders. *One Man's War* is not a film about the Occupation but a meditation on the different forms in which that Occupation can be represented. **Sergio Wolf**
Translated by Mar Diestro-Dópidio

9 Sans soleil (Chris Marker, 1982)

There are many moments to quicken the heart in *Sans soleil* but one in particular demonstrates the method at work in Marker's peerless film. An unseen female narrator reads from letters sent to her by a globetrotting cameraman named Sandor Krasna (Marker's *nom de voyage*), one of which muses on the 11th-century Japanese writer Shonagon Sei. As we hear of Shonagon's "list of elegant things, distressing things, even of things not worth doing", we watch images of a missile being



Occupation therapy: images take the lead in Cozarinsky's meditative *One Man's War*

launched and a hovering bomber. What's the connection? There is none. Nothing here fixes word and image in illustrative lockstep; it's in the space between them that *Sans soleil* makes room for the spectator to drift, dream and think – to inimitable effect.

Sans soleil was Marker's return to a personal mode of filmmaking after more than a decade in militant cinema. His reprise of the epistolary form looks back to earlier films such as *Letter from Siberia* (1958) but the 'voice' here is both intimate and removed. The narrator's reading of Krasna's letters flips the first person to the third, using 'he' instead of 'I'. Distance and proximity in the words mirror, multiply and magnify both the distances travelled and the time spanned in the images, especially those of the 1960s and its lost dreams of revolutionary social change. While it's handy to define *Sans soleil* as an 'essay film', there's something about the dry term that doesn't do justice to the experience of watching it. After Marker's death last year, when writing the programme note on the film, I came up with a line that captures something of what it's like to watch *Sans soleil*: "a mesmerising, lucid and lovely river of film, which, like the river of the ancients, is never the same when one steps into it a second time". **Chris Darke**



Sans soleil

10 Handsworth Songs

(Black Audio Film Collective, 1986)
Made at the time of civil unrest in Birmingham, this key example of the essay film at its most complex remains relevant both formally and thematically. *Handsworth Songs* is no straightforward attempt to provide answers as to why the riots happened; instead, using archive film spliced with made and found footage of the events and the media and popular reaction to them, it creates a poetic sense of context. The film is an example of counter-media in that it slows down the demand for either immediate explanation or blanket condemnation. Its stillness allows the history of immigration and the subsequent hostility of the media and the police to the black and Asian population to be told in careful detail. One repeated scene shows a young black man running through a group of white policemen who surround him on all sides. He manages to break free several times before being wrestled to the ground; if only for one brief, utopian moment, an entirely different history of race in the UK is opened up. The waves of post-war immigration are charted in the stories told both by a dominant (and frequently repressive) televisual narrative and, importantly, by migrants themselves. ➔



Handsworth Songs

Interviews mingle with voiceover, music accompanies the machines that the Windrush generation work at. But there are no definitive answers here, only, as the Black Audio Film Collective memorably suggests, “the ghosts of songs”. **Nina Power**

11 Los Angeles Plays Itself

(Thom Andersen, 2003)

Besides the sunlight and the industrial freedom, one of the attractions that drew early film pioneers out west was the versatility of the southern Californian landscape: with sea, snowy mountains, desert, fruit groves, Spanish missions, an urban downtown and suburban boulevards all within a 100-mile radius, the Los Angeles basin quickly and famously became a kind of giant open-air film studio, available and pliant.

Of course, some people actually live there too. “Sometimes I think that gives me the right to criticise,” growls native Angeleno Andersen in his forensic three-hour prosecution of moving images of the movie city, whose mounting litany of complaints – couched in Encke King’s gravelly, near-parodically irritated voiceover, and sometimes organised, as Stuart Klawans wrote in *The Nation*, “in the manner of a saloon orator” – belies a sly humour leavening a radically serious intent.

Inspired in part by Mark Rappaport’s factual essay appropriations of screen fictions (*Rock Hudson’s Home Movies*, 1993; *From the Journals of Jean Seberg*, 1995), as well as Godard’s *Histoire(s) de cinéma*, this “city symphony in reverse” asserts public rights to our screen discourse through its magpie method as well as its argument. (Today you could rebrand it ‘Occupy Hollywood’.) Tinseltown malfeasance is evidenced across some 200 different film clips, from offences against geography and slurs against architecture to the overt historical mythologies of *Chinatown* (1974), *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988) and *L.A. Confidential* (1997), in which the city’s class and cultural fault-lines are repainted “in crocodile tears” as doleful tragedies of conspiracy, promoting hopelessness in the face of injustice. Andersen’s film by contrast spurs us to independent activism, starting with the reclamation of our gaze: “What if we watch with our voluntary attention, instead of letting the movies direct us?” he asks, peering beyond the foregrounding of character and story. And what if more movies were better and more useful, helping us see our world for what it is? *Los Angeles Plays Itself* grows most moving – and useful – extolling the Los Angeles neorealism Andersen has in mind: stories of “so many men unneeded, unwanted”, as he says over a scene from Billy Woodberry’s *Bless Their Little Hearts* (1983), “in a world in which there is so much to be done”. **Nick Bradshaw**

12 La Morte Rouge

(Víctor Erice, 2006)

The famously unprolific Spanish director Víctor Erice may remain best known for his full-length fiction feature *The Spirit of the Beehive* (1973), but his other films are no less rewarding. Having made a brilliant foray into the fertile territory located somewhere between ‘documentary’ and ‘fiction’ with *The Quince Tree Sun* (1992), in this half-hour film



Bus top: the sky’s the limit for the ever-present film business in *Los Angeles Plays Itself*

What did it signify that postman Potts was not, in fact, Potts but the killer – and an actor (whatever that was) to boot?

made for the ‘Correspondences’ exhibition exploring resemblances in the oeuvres of Erice and Kiarostami, the relationship between reality and artifice becomes his very subject. A ‘small’ work, it comprises stills, archive footage, clips from an old Sherlock Holmes movie, a few brief new scenes – mostly without actors – and music by Mompou and (for once, superbly used) Arvo Pärt. If its tone – it’s introduced as a “soliloquy” – and scale are modest, its thematic range and philosophical sophistication are considerable.

The title is the name of the Québécois village that is the setting for *The Scarlet Claw* (1944),



La Morte Rouge

a wartime Holmes mystery starring Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce which was the first movie Erice ever saw, taken by his sister to the Kursaal cinema in San Sebastian. For the five-year-old, the experience was a revelation: unable to distinguish the ‘reality’ of the newsreel from that of the nightmare world of Roy William Neill’s film, he not only learned that death and murder existed but noted that the adults in the audience, presumably privy to some secret knowledge denied him, were unaffected by the corpses on screen. Had this something to do with war? Why was *La Morte Rouge* not on any map? And what did it signify that postman Potts was not, in fact, Potts but the killer – and an actor (whatever that was) to boot?

From such personal reminiscences – evoked with wondrous intimacy in the immaculate Castilian of the writer-director’s own wry narration – Erice fashions a lyrical meditation on themes that have underpinned his work from *Beehive* to *Broken Windows* (2012): time and change, memory and identity, innocence and experience, war and death. And because he understands, intellectually and emotionally, that the time-based medium he himself works in can reveal unforgettably vivid realities that belong wholly to the realm of the imaginary, *La Morte Rouge* is a great film not only about the power of cinema but about life itself. **Geoff Andrew**

i These 12 films screen at BFI Southbank, London, as part of the Sight & Sound Deep Focus season ‘Thought in Action: The Art of the Essay Film’, which runs throughout August and includes a keynote lecture by Kodwo Eshun on 1 August, a talk by Laura Rascaroli on 27 August and a panel discussion chaired by Chris Darke on 28 August

g A new video essay by Kevin B. Lee will be published at bfi.org.uk/sightandsound, followed by sample clips from the 12 films

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PREVIEW

NOW YOU SEE HER

Known in the West as an actress, Mania Akbari is also one of Iran's most distinctive filmmakers, as a forthcoming retrospective reveals

By Mar Diestro-Dópido

"I will not return to my country until there is real change in Iran." Thus reads the ringing declaration on the website of Iranian filmmaker, actress and artist Mania Akbari (born 1974 in Tehran), who has been living in exile in London since 2012 in the wake of the Iranian government's hardening stance on culture, including the imprisonment and house arrest of various Iranian filmmakers and artists, most notably Jafar Panahi. Whether the recent election (won by Hassan Rouhani, a moderate cleric) will bring about the change Akbari hopes for remains to be seen.

Akbari is one of the most significant filmmakers to emerge from a country in which artistic expression of any kind is stringently

monitored, especially from women. Her direct but radical approach to topics such as religion, relationships, women's repression, war, homosexuality, beauty, death and illness have given rise to one of the most distinctive bodies of work in recent Iranian filmmaking, which is to be showcased in a complete retrospective at BFI Southbank in July.

Nevertheless, Akbari is probably still best known to Western audiences as an actress, particularly as the fiercely argumentative but magnetic driver in her compatriot Abbas Kiarostami's *10* (2001), in which she, together with her son Amin Maher and sister Roya, played a version of herself. The sense of raw self-exposure in that film turned out to be prescient of her own work, in which Akbari has dissected herself (and her body), her culture and her roots in a variety of forms including documentaries, video art projects, photography-based exhibitions, fiction features and a recently published book of short stories called *The Story Without Découpage*.

It's Akbari's insistence on viewing politics through the personal, her bold exploration of the

thorny tensions between public and private, that really sets her work apart. Her honest, intimate approach not only banishes superficial Western stereotypes about Iranian culture but imparts a flesh-and-blood three-dimensionality to her characters and subjects. Take her first experience as co-director, with Mahmood Ayden, on the documentary *Crystal* (2003). What starts out as a seemingly straightforward investigation of an unusual ailment – a young Kurdish woman, Ayshe, produces crystal stones from various parts of her body, including her eyes, throat and vagina – soon turns into personal revelation. Surprisingly, the dead time between hospital trips becomes the focus of the film; Akbari gains the trust of Ayshe and gets to the heart of the abusive treatment meted out to Kurdish women. Little by little, the film becomes about the genuine bond flourishing between these two women, who are lonely and isolated in different ways.

But it is in her first solo outing as director, *20 Fingers* (2004), that Akbari establishes her own recognisable aesthetic approach. Adopting *10*'s episodic structure, Akbari



Driving force: Mania Akbari in Abbas Kiarostami's *10*, a work that presaged the semi-documentary approach she would take in many of her own projects

herself and Bijan Daneshmand play a couple engaged in role-playing in order to try to save their faltering relationship. The technique enables Akbari to analyse the possibilities and restrictions defining relationships in Iran from every possible perspective, particularly women's, but does so with subtle applications of deadpan humour, a key element in her work.

Another recurrent motif in Akbari's films is her characters' questioning and adjustment of their social roles, figured by constant (even desperate) motion – many scenes take place in cars, on motorbikes, boats, trains and cable cars. The latter also features in the partly fictionalised documentary *10+4* (2007) and *One.Two.One* (2011); like the merry-go-round on which newlyweds sit in Akbari's (aptly titled) experimental art video *Escape* (2004), the circular movement of the cable car is a reminder of the inescapability of social conventions, its apparent forward motion belying the fact that the characters inside it are literally hanging in the air, trapped. But transformation can still be achieved: in *10+4* and *One.Two.One*, the cable car becomes a site for self-revelation; in *Escape* the newlyweds' bodies become detached from their heads and move in different directions. For Akbari, marriage in Iran, with all its impositions on women, results in the disintegration of an individual.

In the end, it all comes back to the family; for Akbari, it's the unavoidable nucleus of who we are, the point of origin of all our beliefs and – judging by the recriminations between mother and son in *10* and *10+4* – the site of the strongest conflicts. Her most recent art works, *In My Country Men Have Breasts* (2012) and *I Slept with My Mother, My Father, My Brother and My Sister in a Country Called Iran* (2012), focus on the links between family and nation, and their power to define who we are. Her 2010 documentary about the execution of a minor, *30 Minutes to 6am*, provocatively questions a series of interviewees on such themes as revenge, justice and pain, and the role that cinema and the family play in Iran with regard to the perpetuation and normalisation of violence.

It is no surprise, then, that *10+4* – a continuation of and homage to *10* – opens with footage from Kiarostami's film of Akbari and her son bickering in the car, followed by new footage of them engaged in the same activity four years later. This film also records a life-changing moment for Akbari. Soon after she reproaches her son with "You are like your father. He shut me away, destroyed me", the camera finally turns to her and we see that her bald head is covered by a small beanie. It transpires that Akbari is undergoing treatment for the breast cancer that would eventually lead to her having a double mastectomy. She is 30.

10+4 is Akbari's most brutally personal film, her most movingly honest and vulnerable. She shows herself dealing with the toll wrought by cancer, confronting the possibility of her own death as well as the stigma attached to the illness in the eyes of family and society. For some, the illness is her punishment for not conforming; she herself declares towards the end of the film that "part of me knew this was a wrath, a punishment, a revenge".



Escape

But, as the line from Nietzsche goes, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. In the last episode of *10+4*, a woman who's beaten cancer twice gives advice to a seemingly recovered Akbari. In the woman's opinion, if Akbari uses the illness to create something, she'll be tempting the disease to come back. But for an artist so preoccupied with the notion of identity – with establishing a dialogue between the individual and the collective, with exploring the person we have constructed, the person we are expected to be and the person we long to be – how could she not? Akbari will transform her experience of the emotional and physical scars left by the disease into one of the pillars of her work.

An inevitable corollary of Akbari's search for identity is a preoccupation with female grooming, regarded – together with the ban on dancing and smoking in public spaces and the compulsory headscarf – as yet another imposition on Iranian women, another form of female enslavement, in this case shared with the West. Paradoxically, the social pressures exerted on Iranian women to maintain a certain standard of femininity are just as strong as the pressure to conceal it, creating an interesting dialectic between pleasure and repression.

The search for inner beauty becomes the essence of personal transformation in arguably Akbari's most accomplished work to date, *One.Two.One* (2011). The young, beautiful protagonist Ava shuttles from beauty parlour to psychologist to fortune-teller in an attempt to regain her self-

Paradoxically, the social pressures to maintain a certain standard of femininity are as strong as the pressure to conceal it



10+4



One.Two.One

confidence after her face has been disfigured in an accident. When Ava looks inwards at herself instead of outwards at men, family and society, female grooming becomes an act of self-discovery and therefore one of defiance against the invisibility and powerlessness of women in Iran.

A similar process occurs in Akbari's latest film (unfinished owing to her exile), *From Tehran to London*, a love triangle between talented young poet Ava (who may or may not be the same character from *One.Two.One*), her older conservative husband and their overtly sensual maid who, provocatively, only has eyes for Ava. After one of the couple's habitual quarrels, Ava applies the red lipstick that her husband now disapproves of her wearing (he'd rather have an obedient wife than the sexy young woman who once seduced him) and kisses the mirror to arouse him; but what the camera actually shows is Ava sensuously, playfully kissing herself. In the film's companion piece *Dancing Mania*, a beautiful homage to Akbari by her sister Roya, female bonding and pleasure through music and dancing rise above the pain and restrictions that constitute their reality.

If I had to single out the key aspect of Akbari's work, I'd argue that it's the movement of the camera in *One.Two.One*, which sways gently, almost imperceptibly from side to side as the immobile characters deliver their lines flatly. This nurturing movement is mirrored in the palindromic title as well as the rocking of the cable car, and even the way the camera plays hide-and-seek with Ava's face; always semi-concealed by a veil, a scarf, a bandage or a side-view camera angle, she appears and then disappears, sometimes in the foreground, sometimes in the background, to the point where the viewer doubts if she is actually the protagonist.

The same could be said of Akbari herself, who is always present in her work yet always changing, always moving, looking in and looking out, to the past and to the present. "We are all constantly appearing and disappearing," she explains. "Imagine there is someone on a swing behind that wall. You only see the swing sometimes, but when you don't see it, you know you will again, even if the next time you see the person they won't be same." When life itself is in constant flux, standing still can only lead to the passive acceptance of circumstances. ☺



A Mania Akbari season runs at BFI Southbank, London from 14 to 28 July. *One.Two.One* is just out on DVD from Second Run in the UK

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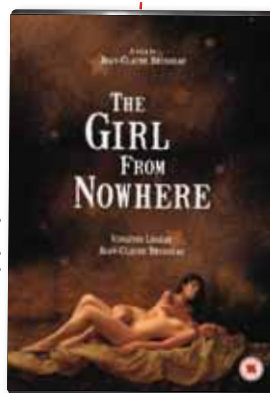


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THE FAR COUNTRY

Northern exposure: Aarne Tarkas's 1963 *Villin pohjolan kulta* (*Gold of the Wild North*)

The 22nd Festival of Finnish Cinema offered the ideal chance to explore the country's rich legacy of local takes on the western

By Olaf Möller

An anniversary seemed as good a reason as any to venture north to Turku, Finland's former capital, for the 22nd edition of the annual Festival of Finnish Cinema organised by the Finnish National Audiovisual Archive (KAVA). It's a small event, just one luxuriously extended weekend, with some two dozen screenings, mainly of works from the far and farther past, plus a seminar dedicated to a seemingly bizarre subject: Finnish westerns, colloquially called 'northerns'.

Yes, that's films featuring folks sporting Stetsons and behaving as if they were dukin' it out on the dusty streets of Laredo while standing in the midst of a sandy ditch near Helsinki looking a bit *off* (and not only their rockers). Finland also has something like a local variation on the western: movies set in the vast plains of Ostrobothnia, a region whose *hombres* (still) know how to talk tough and wield a mean knife.

Orion, a Helsinki cinema run by KAVA, showed an extended season of Ostrobothnia films last summer, coinciding with the theatrical opening of the subgenre's latest example, JP Siili's *Once upon a Time in the North* (*Härmä*, 2012) – a film that showed an unexpected amount of respect towards its antecedents, even if it failed miserably in comparison even to such artistically modest but historically noteworthy early examples as Jalmari Lahdensuo's freshly restored *Pohjalaisia* (*The Ostrobothnians*, 1925),

let alone a masterpiece like Ilmari Unho's brash, boisterous and ballsy *Härmästä poikia kymmenen* (*Ten Boys from Härmä*, 1950).

The film's awful publicity art, along with an inauspicious English title that conjured unwelcome memories of *The Good, the Bad and the Weird* (Joeun-nom, nappeun-nom, yisanghan-nom), suggested that this might be a postmodernist fusion of Ostrobothnian and northern. Well, it isn't. Marked by pastiche or poseur-ish aesthetics it might be, but *Once upon a Time in the North* makes no attempt at being anything other than a spiced-up Ostrobothnian. The northern, on the other hand, tries to make Finland look like the Wild West: its characters wear weird hats, sing in saloons, brawl in bars and dispense frontier justice. Much of this is not completely alien to Finnish culture, including the omnipresence of arms; more than just a good-natured joke, the northern hits closer to home than its campy appearance might suggest.

Five northerns were shown in Turku: a loose trilogy by Aarne Tarkas made up of *Villi pohjola* (*Wild North*, 1955), *Villin pohjolan kulta* (*Gold of the Wild North*, 1963) and *Villin pohjolan salattu laakso* (*The Secret Valley of the Wild North*, 1963), the first featuring javelinist/chansonnier/actor

Tapio Rautavaara as Tundra-Tauno; and a pair of works by producer/star Spede Pasanen, the cult classic *Hirttämättömät* (*The Unhanged*) co-directed by Pasanen and Vesa-Matti Loiri,

*Hirttämättömät* (*The Unhanged*)

The 'northern' tries to make Finland look like the Wild West, with weird hats, saloons, brawls and frontier justice

1971) and the lesser-known *Speedy Gonzales – noin 7 veljeksen poika* (*Speedy Gonzales – the Son of About Seven Brothers*, directed by Ere Kokkonen, 1970). The main difference between the works of Tarkas and Pasanen lies in their attitude towards the western proper: the later films are all-out spoofs, shamelessly goofy, gleefully crazy and running full-tilt on anti-establishment sentiments; the earlier ones are something like wide-eyed yet highly ironic declarations of love.

If one wants to compare *Villi pohjola* with anything, it wouldn't be with the Karl May or Indianer films of the two Germanies, nor with anything produced between the hills of Rome and Almería. Rather, it would be with certain Nikkatsu actioners, above all Saito Buichi's fabulous *Wataridori* series. Both the *Villi pohjola* and the *Wataridori* series play in Neverlands where western stereotypes are as ordinary as the most local kinds of behaviour and people; both exude the extraordinary charm of 40-year-old boys at play in a mighty big sandbox, innocent and keenly aware of life's entrapments at the same time; both have something irascible to them, a humour that is warm-hearted, self-deprecating and now lost to cruder forms of fun.

The festival showed that there's beauty to be found in even the most far-off places – for those who are curious, open-minded and productively disdainful of matters of canon and compromise. Something to think about at a time when the bigger events and institutions seem ever less keen on rethinking film history and prefer regurgitating the familiar under different headings. ☺

BACK TO THE SOURCE

The Source Family's soundtrack and audio recordings give the documentary a rawness that cuts through the Age of Aquarius clichés

By Frances Morgan

In *The Source Family*, the word of God is spread via the divine spark of electricity: amplified, recorded and transmitted via mics, speakers and cassette players, reel-to-reel tapes and private-press records. The new documentary by Jodi Wille and Maria Demopoulos about the Californian collective that began as a health-food enterprise in the late 1960s and became an esoteric community (perceived by some to be a cult) centred around the teachings of Jim Baker, aka Father Yod and later YaHoWa, tells the story of a search for enlightenment in the age of mass media and personal documentation.

Following spells as a US marine and a restaurateur, Baker (born 1922) seemed an unlikely candidate to become spiritual leader of a largely youthful community that grew up around The Source, his vegetarian restaurant based on Los Angeles's Sunset Strip. Yet the countercultural rupture of the 1960s seemed to offer the bankrupted businessman and alleged bank robber a new start in life, as did his relationship with Robin, his much younger wife, who assumed the title of Mother Ah-Om to the rapidly expanding Source Family and, with her husband, helped draw up a philosophy for the group. This incorporated elements of Eastern mysticism and Western occultism along with raw-food diets, daily hits of the 'sacred herb', and a sexual philosophy that started off celebrating the Edenic image of one man and 'his' woman (as a list of commandments has it) before delving into polyamory and sex magic in the group's later years.

The Source Family combined the sacred with the profane and freedom from mainstream society with devotion to an archaic patriarchal system. While Yod's young converts dressed like ancient mystics, with white robes and flowing hair, they were at the same time inescapably modern, attuned to (and in some cases refugees from) the popular culture of the time, well versed in rock 'n' roll, movies, style and how to express and present oneself. And they recorded everything.

The music of *The Source Family* is one of its most striking aspects. The DVD of the film was released in June by the US avant-rock imprint Drag City, along with a soundtrack album that's a 14-track précis of the music produced by the psychedelic rock bands that formed within the community between 1973 and 74. *The Spirit of 76* and *Ya Ho Wa 13* released a number of records on their own label Higher Key, which have long been sought-after by record collectors.

The music is a gift for the filmmakers, who are able to construct a near-constant soundtrack of flanged guitar, chants of "Awake! Awake from your sleep!" and percussive jams. In 1973, Yod funded a lavish studio in the Father House, The Source's second communal home in Nichols Canyon in the Hollywood Hills,



Of gods and men: Father Yod's speeches were like a cross between Lenny Bruce and Krishnamurti

kitted out by members of the community who were experienced musicians. Nonetheless, many of the resulting recordings tend towards primitive, semi-improvised rock with trancelike rhythms, given an extra unhinged DIY quality by their leader's presence as frontman on kettle drums, gong and shouted vocals. One iteration of the group played gigs at local high schools, with Yod addressing the students like a cross

between Jim Morrison and a groovy headteacher: "We heard this is the high school with the consciousness! You believe in reincarnation, don't you? You will come again, won't you?"

As well as the nine 'official' releases of The Source's bands, a huge amount of unreleased music exists in the Source archives, kept to this day by the appointed historian of the community, Isis Aquarian. It is her film footage, audio recordings and photography that make *The Source Family* possible. She emerges as one of the film's most interesting characters, joining The Source as a self-assured young woman with filmmaking experience who quickly became an important member of the family (as well as one of Yod's 14 wives, after he had decided to revoke his sixth commandment). "I took my camera and my tape recorder and went right into the inner circle", she says, amassing many recordings of Yod's morning meditations and classes. While Isis's film footage is stunning, skilfully documenting rituals, daily life and even childbirth within the community, the audio she captured adds an intense, sometimes harsh edge to the sun-kissed



The Source Family


COURTESY: ISIS AQUARIAN ARCHIVES

and idyllic visuals, in which Source members seem very much aware that they're being filmed. Beautiful young men and women smile for the camera, strike poses reminiscent of record sleeves – or just wave, as in any suburban home movie.

Because the era – the Age of Aquarius and its immediate aftermath – has been so well documented and aestheticised in film and fashion, it's easy to feel as if you're watching yet another nostalgic fiction, made in the present day, about 'The 60s'. By contrast, what Isis picks up with her portable tape recorder has a rawness that cuts through the retro haze. Mostly, you hear Yod's daily speeches, which he delivers in a style that one interviewee describes as somewhere between Lenny Bruce and Krishnamurti: there are riffs on the holy power of "balling", some Beat-style free association, and mystical pronouncements: "You are nothing but a channel, an instrument for the divine purpose of God." Despite some tape distortion, the quality is good enough that it's possible to hear peripheral sounds – coughing, spaced-out laughter, murmured assents. The air in the room comes alive. Yod's voice is often terser than you might imagine, slightly strangled, with emphases on unexpected words. "Some ascetics on the path seek to kill our pleasure," he says. "They will not have it... It's a game. Play it. Use pleasure. Fearlessly." It has the tone of an edict, not an encouragement. Among *The Source Family's* modern-day interviewees there are surprisingly few dissenting voices about Yod, memory and distance softening and rationalising their experiences. But the tape recordings emphasise how hermetic and insular communities like The Source have to be in order to thrive; how they

While the archive film footage is stunning, the audio adds an intense, sometimes harsh edge to the sun-kissed and idyllic visuals

start to develop their own syntax and vocabulary.

Isis's role as recording angel continued up until Yod's death in a hang-gliding accident. In 1975, *The Source*, its numbers depleted, had moved to Hawaii, where they struggled to be self-sufficient and dispel the locals' fears of them as a Manson Family-style cult. One morning, Yod decided to hang-glide from the island's cliffs, and crashed on the beach below. In a memorable image, he lies on the sand, surrounded by women – one of whom, of course, is Isis, tape recorder in hand. The audio here is grimly compelling: having previously been recorded screaming at the idea of his gliding trip, the women now moan his name. Yet they seem detached from any kind of normal reaction to such a serious accident. One asks quite innocently, when Yod states that his back is broken, "What can we do to heal it?" There's a pause. "Transmute the pain," he replies, almost inaudibly. The women moan again, but softly, almost sensually. Caught on tape rather than film, their voices are ghostly and disembodied. They converge into a haunting and traumatised murmur, the sound of humans who have tried to create a heaven on earth, and now find themselves suddenly lost. 

PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA

The preservation of celluloid is crucial to maintaining film heritage but there are some places only digital can reach



By Céline Ruivo

In 1954, Jonas and Adolfas Mekas, Lithuanian immigrant brothers who survived a Nazi labour camp at the end of World War II before arriving in New York, published a new independent magazine entitled *Film Culture*. The name was deliberately provocative, positing that cinema wasn't just the terrain of major studios but was also, for individuals and independent artists, a cultural movement.

Contributors to *Film Culture* included Andrew Sarris, Richard Leacock, Rudolf Arnheim and Arlene Croce, along with the experimental filmmaker Stan Brakhage who, like Jonas Mekas, began interpreting 16mm and Super 8 celluloid as a canvas, applying to filmstock artistic processes ranging from stop-motion and speed variations to scratches, scrapes and collage. Inspired by silent filmmakers like Georges Méliès and experimental pioneer Norman McLaren, they took to creating special effects during shooting and production, often also painting their work by hand.

Their tactile approach should remind us of another cultural movement. The rise of hip hop in the 1970s began with the medium of vinyl discs launching the new form of turntablism, providing beats and rhythms by mixing, superimposing sources and alternating speeds to create a new aesthetic. Early pioneers such as Grand Wizard Theodore and Grandmaster Flash also viewed their work as a form of cultural reappropriation from the mainstream. Thanks to a dedicated subculture of artists and music lovers who continue to collect vinyl, it has so far resisted extinction even as major distributors have abandoned the format. Among vinyl diehards, the medium has gained a commercial foothold through famous bands and recording studios such as Jack White's *The Third Man*.

Film formats, however, have been almost totally replaced by digital files; some film manufacturers, including Fuji, have stopped production of 16mm and 35mm. British artist Tacita Dean, a contemporary practitioner of experimental filmmaking, is among those supporting a proposal to UNESCO to recognise film as world heritage. At the same time, from an archival perspective, the advent of high-resolution digital tools could be seen as aiding the preservation of cinematographic heritage. A good example is our 4K digital restoration at Cinémathèque Française (where I am curator of film collections) of Gaston Velle's gorgeously hand-stencilled *Rêve d'Art* (1912): we were able to recover true black-and-white tones as well as the fidelity of the dyes from the original 35mm nitrate print, whereas an earlier non-digital

Digital tools are very powerful but the tendency to aesthetic homogenisation must be resisted




Rêve d'Art (1912), a triumph of digital restoration

restoration proved incapable of duplicating the tones correctly through the colour tints. In 4K, we were also able to erase all decomposition stains and other damage to the print before returning it to its original 35mm format.

The 35mm projection of silent movies still provides a superior experience to digital projection, since the varying frame rates (16fps, 18fps, 20fps) cannot be held by digital projectors. Numerous compromises (compression, motion interpolation) must be made in regard to the photographic quality to recreate a file with the correct rate. As an archivist, this can be frustrating when we know that analogue restoration is six to ten times less expensive and has a better result for projection, but we must consider the broader implications of the end of film and the rise of digital.

Digital tools are extremely flexible and powerful, but a dangerous tendency is emerging in the restoration world. Images and sounds are becoming homogenised according to a standard set by the distribution industry. Many cases exist today of films where DVD and Blu-ray products have been stripped of their original characteristics to meet market sensibilities, giving the disturbing whitewashed look described in Nick Wrigley's essay 'Crimes against the grain' (S&S, December 2012). Wrigley sees this as cultural vandalism in which older special effects (created by the optical printing method), considered too clumsy, are corrected, colours are graded according to modern tastes, mono soundtracks converted to stereo and the very grain of the film wiped clean. This sanitisation of the original technical intent of the films denies cinema's history.

So where does this digital encroachment leave us with our daily aesthetic experience? Why do we still want to listen to a vinyl record or to see projected Super 8, 16mm, 35mm or 70mm films? Some have argued that these questions only concern purists. Maybe. Nevertheless, the feelings are genuine and are shared, like the thrill of watching a unique projection, listening to a favourite record or collecting films as beautiful objects. It is not just a sentimental exercise to preserve film in its original form; it is the vital path to creating a thriving culture that has a past, a present – and a future. 



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SPITTING OUT THE TRUTH

Politics, personae, perversion and play collide in the radical and frequently caustic work of Israeli artist Roe Rosen

By Barbara Wurm

The film world is occasionally infiltrated by the art world. You don't like that? You think all art does is disseminate dry discourses into a lively realm of images? Well, Roe Rosen is the man (and sometimes the woman) to torpedo your convictions. That's his thing: the disturbance of firm beliefs, the subversion and perversion of authoritarian or dominant speech acts, the sabotage of existing (media) formats of social control, the suspension of conventional human behaviour. The paintings, films and narratives of Rosen (who heads the advanced visual arts programme at Ha'Midrasha Art College and teaches at the Bezalel Art Academy in Jerusalem) act on subtly constructed microcosmic levels, promoting the power of minorities – whether in relation to ethnicity, gender, sexuality or class. They also address the borderlines of the ethical, the cutting edge of politics and aesthetics, by 'performing singularity' rather than making universal statements.

But at the same time – and this is the thrilling, albeit deconstructively inconvenient, even horrifying, aspect of it – his oeuvre is not just a conceptualist transfer of, say, Deleuze, Bataille and their (queerer) like, but an intellectually refined yet fiercely bodily repudiation of art's apparent divorce from reality. It imposes introspection by inflicting pain; it attacks by spitting out the more or less undigested truths of contemporary political discourse. Here we have, finally, the return of a strategy barely identifiable in our post-ism times: provocation! How else to describe a stand-up routine delivered by a deliberately sinister woman (Hani Furstenberg in *Hilarious*, 2010) who cracks one unfunny joke after another, transgressing, as if by accident, every possible taboo along the way, including the comparison of the Israeli occupation with the Nazis.

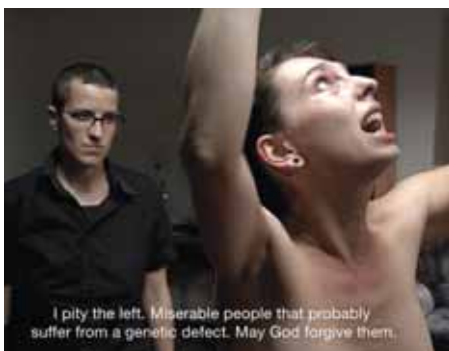
The middle part of Rosen's latest filmic triptych and winner of the Orizzonti award for best medium-length film at Venice in 2010, *Out (Tse)* focuses on a central yet liminal body part: the buttocks. We watch one woman (Yoana Gonen) spank the naked bottom of another woman (Ela Shapira) until it's black-brown and blue-green. The session is shown in changing shots; some close-ups fix our gaze on the thrashing site but more often Shapira's facial expressions are foregrounded. Witnessing the gradual increase of pain is an utterly discomforting spectacle for many reasons, mainly connected with the first part of the film, the documentary-interview mode of which connotes serious sincerity. The women introduce themselves as lesbian members of the Israeli BDSM community and talk about their political identities: Gonen is a left-winger convinced that extreme sex reflects and reveals empowerment, is bound up with questions of domination and submission; Shapira (no less self-conscious



Identity crisis: in *Confessions* Rosen puts his speech into the mouths of three different women

Rosen is an artist with enormous erudition and a voracious, nearly libidinous interest in the analysis of ethical transgression

and reflective) grew up in a clearly racist Israeli environment, the symbolic coin of which, in Israeli terms, is the foreign minister of the time, Avigdor Lieberman. What the sub's mouth spits out are his words, his utterings. She is possessed by his demon; having internalised his thoughts and sentences, now it's time to disgorge them ("I pity the left. Miserable people that probably suffer from a genetic defect... There is no problem in transferring the Arab population. It's the only solution"). This fierce yet playful exorcism – after all, we are not witnessing disgust but desire, on both sides – is underlined by the occasional overlay of Rosen's own parodist demon paintings (a device used across his whole oeuvre, as are ventriloquism and disembodied voices), and is completed by the film's chilled-out third part, in which the living room is inhabited by guitar- and musical saw-players delivering the Russian poet Esenin's *Letter to Mother*. Rosen has called this "a direct, if twisted, homage to the final scene of another film that



Hard-hitting: *Out (Tse)*

deals with radical sexuality and politics: Dušan Makavejev's *WR, Mysteries of the Organism*".

Rosen's distinguished position as a visual artist with enormous erudition and a voracious, nearly libidinous interest in the analysis of ethical transgression allows his cinematic experience to be nourished by several sources, including hidden strands of film history. Each of his pieces opens up a whole spectrum of references to formats, genres, modes or individual films. A prime example is the *Confession* series, which consists of a trailer (*Confessions Coming Soon*, 2007), a bonus-track gag reel (*Gagging During Confessions: Names and Arms*, 2008), a music video (*I Was Called Kuny-Lemel*, 2007) and the actual film (*The Confessions of Roe Rosen*, 2008). Here again, it's the medium that transforms politically precarious discourse. What sound distortion achieves in *Out* (the demon's voice) is the teleprompter's task in *Confessions*: three women with different ethnic backgrounds introduce themselves as Roe Rosen and utter Hebrew sentences that have been transliterated into alphabets with which they are familiar. The result is speech made strange and sometimes quite distorted. At the same time, these confessions challenge the moral regime of the genre as understood by St Augustine et al; you don't just ask someone else to take on your deeds.

Play with personae, invented, confused and dissolved, is also performed in the video *Two Women and a Man, Joanna Führer-Ha'sfari on Justine Frank* (2005), which launched Rosen's filmmaking career. The names used generate a characteristic ambiguity, the Führer referring to you-know-who, Justine Frank being the pseudonym under which Rosen published the pornographic novel *Sweet Sweat* (itself evoking de Sade's novel *Justine*). If you've struggled with Derrida's idea of travelling signifiers, watch Rosen. His network of references is set up to facilitate experimental examination of the multiple realities we live in. The mocking bird's meanest piece, *Hilarious*, brings it all out once again: Rosen's art is defamiliarisation at its best, an apotheosis of the uncanny. ☹

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Reviews



84 **My Father and the Man in Black**

Pop-cultural history and personal catharsis are fused to intriguing effect as Jonathan Holiff trawls through the archives of his emotionally negligent, absent father, who managed Johnny Cash in the 1960s



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Caped crusader: *Sophía Oria as the young Carmencita and Daniel Giménez Cacho as her father in Pablo Berger's *Blancanieves**

Blancanieves

Spain/France/Belgium 2011

Director: Pablo Berger

Certificate 12A 105m 2s

Reviewed by Mar Diestro-Dópido

Flamenco, torero, fiesta... from the 1950s onwards these aspects of Spanish life were massively extolled by dictator General Franco to sell the illusion of Spain as a happy, passionate, party-loving nation – encapsulated in the tourist-friendly motto ‘Spain is different’ – and in a bid to open up the country’s previously autarkic economy. These elements, particularly as figured in the distinctly chauvinist populist cinema endorsed by the regime, were hugely popular in some quarters, but inevitably loathed and rejected in many others, and for many years to come. Whichever position you take, there’s no denying that these clichés are still an essential part of the country’s cinematic imaginary.

For his second feature *Blancanieves*, Spanish writer-director Pablo Berger reconfigures these stereotypes into an initially ludicrous-seeming yet ultimately fantastical and fantastically entertaining celebration/deprecation of all things Spanish, by way of a silent black-and-white *Snow White* narrative relocated to 1920s Andalucía. Berger’s aim is clear: to examine the more

populist elements of Spanish film history from the perspective of the present; and to reflect, in a personal and refreshingly nostalgia-free manner, on the country, its history and its traditions through the prism of international film history.

Carmencita is the newborn daughter of Antonio Villalta, a celebrated matador who gets badly gored by a bull at a corrida. The shock prompts his heavily pregnant flamenco-singer/dancer wife to go into premature labour, but she doesn’t survive the birth. Grief-stricken, Villalta rejects the newborn and falls into the open arms of his nurse, Encarna (Maribel Verdú, familiar from 2001’s *Y tu mamá también*, giving a brilliant incarnation of evil here), who’ll eventually become Carmencita’s cruel, power-crazed stepmother. Sent to live with her grandmother, Carmencita will only reunite with her father when the former dies. Not for long, though, but long enough for him to train his daughter in the craft of bullfighting – eventually the way she’ll honour his name.

A self-professed silent-cinema obsessive, Berger conceived *Blancanieves* right from the outset as a black-and-white silent film, long before the unashamedly feelgood *The Artist* (2011) and Miguel Gomes’s beautifully downbeat *Tabu* (2012). Those films’ critical and commercial success occurred too late to permit any potential increase in Berger’s severely curtailed budget,

though you would never guess as much from what’s up there on screen – a visually ravishing evocation of the times, in which the burning light of Andalucía seems to spill out from the frame.

Unlike *The Artist*’s nostalgic facsimile of a generic, homogenous silent era, however, *Blancanieves* was never imagined as a reproduction of that fertile period of film history, but rather as a reinterpretation of it, and a meditation on the origins of film language itself. As such, *Blancanieves* includes a melting-pot of film references seamlessly melded and subsumed into a well-developed story. There’s German expressionism in the angular shapes



Snow White, Spanish-style: *Macarena García*



An initially ludicrous-seeming yet ultimately fantastical and fantastically entertaining celebration/deprecation of all things Spanish


cruelty and darkness in classic fairytales, partly by situating this version of *Snow White* not in fantasyland but in a particular historical context. The abundant allusions to 1920s Spain aren't mere window dressing. Encarna, for example – who sports a flapper's haircut – doesn't have a mirror that lies about her beauty, but instead, Norma Desmond-style, seeks and finds her reflection in the gossip columns of the recently launched *Lecturas* magazine (the forerunner to *iHOLA!*) – a critique on celebrity culture then and now.

In *Blancanieves*, Spain is presented as a freak show, or to use a more autochthonous term, like an *esperpento*, a very particular form of the grotesque that brings to mind the Spanish surrealism of compatriot Luis Buñuel and the blackness of Luis García Berlanga, as well as Tod Browning's *Freaks* (1932). When Carmencita is left half-dead and amnesiac after Encarna's lover tries to kill her, she's naturally nicknamed Blancanieves ('Snow White') by the circus troupe of six (not seven) bullfighting dwarves who save her. Their show takes them from town to town, where they mimic the corridas with a heifer rather than a bull, a sort of warm-up act just prior to the real thing; their real-life equivalents, the Enanitos Toreros, do actually exist in Spain.

Carmencita decides to join them. Through this narrative strand (including a pardoned bull), the bloody art of bullfighting is both questioned and openly mocked. What's more, although seemingly celebrated in the figure of Villalta, in fact bullfighting in *Blancanieves* is the trigger of every pain and evil. The conflicts and contradictions that reside at the heart of

this most recognisable of Spanish stereotypes – the backbone of the film – spin the traditional source tale of *Blancanieves* into a bacchanal of Spanishness, which Berger transforms into the very essence of nightmares. The tone, however, is never condemnatory, nor nostalgic, nor least of all parodic. On the contrary, Berger makes the viewer aware of the context shaping his characters and the decisions they make, as he did previously in *Torremolinos 73*, the story of a couple struggling to make ends meet during the last years of the dictatorship (when repression and censorship were at a new – desperate – high) by embarking on a series of homemade porn films.

What makes *Blancanieves* transcend its hall of distorting mirrors – as did *Torremolinos 73* – is precisely its palpable warmth and respect for its subject-matter, underpinned by a recognition of the family as source of the most exalted love but also the fiercest pain, which inevitably brings to mind the Spanish south as imagined by Lorca. One of the film's most striking scenes encapsulates these contradictions: the still stunning Angela Molina (*That Obscure Object of Desire*), as Carmencita's grandmother Doña Concha, dances flamenco with her young granddaughter in the streets of Seville, but as the mood and tempo escalate to an uncontrolled frenzy, a moment of pure happiness and celebration turns sour as Doña Concha collapses dead.

In *Blancanieves* the pleasure resides as much in the layers upon layers of references to film history, to Spanish history, to fairytales, to Hollywood entertainment, as it does in its story of a little girl who loses everything. But unlike the evocative source tale, Carmencita-Blancanieves's destiny is not to be passively rescued by a prince but rather to find her true self. She does so by accepting herself as she is and by managing to shake off amnesia and remember her own past... not unlike the way Berger weighs the good and bad, the high and low, the bright and dark of Spain's past and present. 

of the long, shadowy corridors in the family's lusciously gothic home; Eisenstein in the extreme close-ups on the contorted expressions of secondary characters; von Stroheim in the passion and determination of the female protagonist. Throw in the names of Lang, Tourneur, Duvivier and L'Herbier too, and *Blancanieves* feels like a film revelling brilliantly in the heterogeneity of its multiple influences.

But it's thanks to Berger's adoption of Melodrama (with a capital M, à la Sirk) – big passions, big hatreds, slightly too big performances at times – that *Blancanieves* makes the transition from the international to the local seem so effortless. Taking the tradition of *España negra* (or 'Black Spain' – ie crime, corruption, bigotry), Berger turns it back on itself, firstly to exaggerate it to the point of grotesque deformation, then to deconstruct it to create something completely new. His gaze, simultaneously that of an insider yet necessarily distanced, ultimately creates a hybrid, or what the filmmaker has playfully defined as 'Iberian Hollywood' – a self-reflexive exercise that bridges the typical *Españolada* (a clichéd Spanish film more often than not folkloric in flavour) and the classical Hollywood movie.

Not unlike Guillermo del Toro and Tim Burton, Berger pushes his characters towards grand guignol and takes pains to highlight the

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Ibon Cormenzana
Jérôme Vidal

Written by

Pablo Berger

Director of

Photography

Kiko de la Rica

Editor

Fernando Franco

Production Designer

Alain Bainée

Music

Alfonso de Villalonga

Sound

Felipe Arago

Costume Designer

Paco Delgado

Companies

Arcadia Motion

Pictures SL, Nix Films

AIE, Sisifo Films AIE,

The Kraken Films AIE,

Noodles Production,

Arte France Cinéma

Production, ARTE

France Cinéma

co-production

In association with

uFilm, uFund

With the participation

of Banque Postale

Image 4, Palatine

Etoile 9, Eurimages,

Ministerio de

Cultura – ICAA,

Centre National du

Cinéma et de l'Image

Animée, Generalitat

de Catalunya – ICEC,

ARTE France,

Televisión Española,

Canal+, Televisió

de Catalunya

Executive Producers

Ignasi Estapé

Àngel Duràndez

Julián García Rubí

Jon Bárcena

Fernando Baldellou

Julio Piedra

Adrian Polittowski

Gilles Waterkeyn

Cast

Maribel Verdú

Encarna

Daniel Giménez

Cacho

Antonio Villalta

Sofía Oria

Carmencita

Macarena García

Carmen/

Blancanieves

Pere Ponce

Genaro

José María Pou

Don Carlos

Inma Cuesta

Carmen de Triana

Ramón Barea

Don Martín

Emilio Gavira

Jesusin

Sergio Dorado

Rafita

Alberto Martínez

Josefa

Jinson Añazco

Juanin

Michal Lagosz

Manolin

Jimmy Muñoz

Victorino

Ángela Molina

Doña Concha

Dolby Digital

In Black and White

[1.85:1]

Distributor

StudioCanal Limited

9,453 ft +0 frames

Andalucía, the 1920s. A matador, Antonio Villalta, is badly gored at a corrida. The shock sends Carmen, his heavily pregnant flamenco-singer/dancer wife, into premature labour, during which she dies.

Heartbroken and badly injured, Villalta rejects his newborn daughter Carmencita and takes the nurse who attends him – the evil, calculating Encarna – as his carer and then his wife. Carmencita is sent to live with her grandmother, Doña Concha.

Doña Concha dies and Carmencita is sent back to her father, but Encarna keeps him locked in his room. When Carmencita manages to see her father, he instantly warms to her and soon begins teaching her to bullfight. The power-crazed Encarna kills Villalta and sends Carmencita out into the forest to die.

Now an amnesiac adolescent called Carmen, she is rescued by a touring group of six bullfighting dwarves. She joins them and begins bullfighting herself, though only with heifers. She is picked up by an agent, who arranges a fight for her in Seville's main bullring. When Encarna hears about the fight, she switches the heifer for a bull, but Carmen triumphs nevertheless. As she prepares to strike the deathblow, Carmen suddenly recovers her memory. At the same time, the crowd ask for the animal to be pardoned. Frustrated, Encarna passes a poisoned apple to one of the dwarves to give to Carmen, who falls into a coma. The dwarves kill Encarna.

Now named Blancanieves, Carmen becomes part of a circus attraction where the agent charges people to try to wake her with a kiss. Rafita, a dwarf secretly in love with Carmen, kisses her, and a tear falls down her cheek.

Paradise: Hope

Austria/Germany/France 2012

Director: Ulrich Seidl

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Those who have staggered punch-drunk through the first two parts of Ulrich Seidl's ironically titled *Paradise* trilogy (*Love* and *Faith*, both 2012), never mind the rest of his confrontational oeuvre (features such as 2001's *Dog Days* and 2007's *Import/Export* or documentaries like 1996's *Animal Love*, the latter attracting the unforgettable Werner Herzog quote "Never have I looked so directly into hell"), might be forgiven for anticipating and/or dreading more of the same with *Hope*. Certainly many individual scenes confirm this impression, since the camera stares as unflinchingly as ever at people not in full control of their emotions, each shot usually running just that bit longer than seems entirely appropriate. However, the overall effect is surprisingly humane and even warm, despite these not being adjectives one readily associates with Seidl's work.

Not that the film is exactly a thigh-slapper (barring the scene in which reluctant teenage dieters are cajoled into doing just that while singing – in English – "If you're happy and you know it, clap your fat!"), but there's little doubt that much of it is intentionally funny, and in a far less complicated way than Seidl's grim humour has functioned in the past. Indeed, anyone approaching the film as a Seidl virgin (it works perfectly well as a standalone piece) might well view it as an Austrian cousin to similarly blunt coming-of-age films such as Catherine Breillat's *36 Fillette* (1988) or Lukas Moodysson's *Show Me Love* (1998): on the face of it, it seems to have little in common with *Love*'s Kenyan sex tourism or *Faith*'s study of religious mania, not least because the protagonists of the earlier films were middle-aged.

But 13-year-old Melanie, or Melli (Melanie Lenz), is the daughter of *Love*'s Teresa and the niece of *Faith*'s Anna Maria, and it's now clear that the narratives of all three films run concurrently over the same summer. In particular, a recurring motif in *Love*, in which an emotionally bereft Teresa tries and fails to reach Melli on the phone, is counterpointed here by Melli's own attempts to ring her mother in search of the same kind of emotional support. Melli, like Teresa, is looking for love, but instead she's packed off to a ghastly *Diätcamp*, or 'diet camp', in which 16 similarly overweight teenagers are subjected to a strict regimen of physical exertion, approved food and stern lectures about nutrition. Naturally, they subvert this at every opportunity, raiding the well-stocked kitchen for late-night snacks and contriving excuses to get out of particular exercises – hardly surprisingly, since these are led by a fearsome gym instructor twirling an imaginary whip while bellowing "Lift your legs, like a pony, like Lipizzaners!"

As before, Seidl blurs the line between fact and fiction. The credits reveal that all 16 camp inmates were performing under their real names, and Lenz had already experienced the dubious pleasures of an actual *Diätcamp* prior to being cast. Individual scenes were constructed according to Seidl's established method of encouraging improvised dialogue around a pre-agreed structure. The scenes in which Melli and Verena, her best friend in the camp, discuss their



Unhappy campers: Melli (Melanie Lenz, in yellow) and fellow dieters in Ulrich Seidl's *Paradise: Hope*

(limited) sexual experience in graphic detail feel grubbily voyeuristic at times, but also ring horribly true (all performances, especially those by the kids, are pitch-perfect). Those who have seen Seidl's earlier films are constantly primed to expect the absolute worst, and he's clearly toying sadistically with audience expectations when he concocts such scenes as a paralytically drunk Melli dancing in a nightclub under the gaze of plainly predatory men, or her luring the camp doctor (on whom she has a major crush) into the forest during a day out so that they can be alone.

Melli's relationship with the doctor (who, like all the camp's authority figures, is never named) forms the film's major narrative arc. It's clear there's attraction on both sides, despite an age gap that must be almost four decades, but the treatment is closer to Jaime de Armiñán's unfairly neglected (if once Oscar-nominated) *The Nest* (1980) than *Lolita*, in that far from being a predatory paedophile/ephebophile, the doctor is all too aware of the massive ethical and moral red line which invisibly runs down the middle of the many symmetrical compositions showing him facing Melli from opposite sides of the frame, each willing the other to make the first move.

(There's also some actual colour symbolism going on in the garishly orange chairs outside his office, creating a powerful 'hot seat' effect in an otherwise calculatedly cool lighting schema.)

Melli, like her three immediate roommates (and doubtless a fair number of the others), is the



Hanging out in bars: the teens in the gym



Thaler are constantly alert to the visual possibilities of their primary location, a forbiddingly austere-looking modern building full of glass, bare white walls and gleaming metal furniture. Shooting in the now familiar mixture of fixed-camera tableaux and looser handheld sequences (usually when characters are letting their hair down, often with the aid of alcohol), they were clearly enjoying themselves immensely as they worked out yet another bizarrely Greenaway-esque image of a line or circle of overweight teenagers being forced to run or power-walk past the camera or contort themselves into yet more undignified shapes. There are very occasional echoes of the compositions of the notorious photographs of Guantánamo Bay's Camp Delta or Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison, but Seidl doesn't draw any explicit political parallels.

Any hint of exploitation or 'fat-shaming' is counterbalanced by the fact that the teens seem cheerfully relaxed about their present physical state and none of them appears to be making any of the intended progress (Verena reveals that this is far from her first diet-camp sojourn) – possibly because they're fully aware that the bodily reshaping their parents intend is primarily to enable insertion into social pigeonholes which they themselves might reject.

In other words, everyone involved is expressing hope of some kind, and while it's clearly impossible for all of them to reach their intended paradise (since several scenarios are directly contradictory), the fact that in some cases it seems genuinely achievable offers perhaps the closest thing to a happy ending in Seidl's entire oeuvre. Four bruising hours into the *Paradies* trilogy, who would have expected that? **S**

The overall effect is surprisingly humane and even warm, despite these not being adjectives one readily associates with Seidl's work

child of divorced parents, a fact established early enough for it to become one of the film's main underlying themes. It's partly a classic reversal gag when Melli's friend Hanni rings each parent to give them precisely opposing accounts of camp life (it certainly triggers one of the bigger laughs), but the fact that she's more honest with her father speaks volumes. Melli's own fruitless attempts at getting through to Teresa in Kenya (she's only allowed one hour's phone access a day) retrospectively enrich the recurring motif in *Love* when Teresa tries in turn to contact her. Both films establish that mother and daughter alike are desperately lonely, to the point of contemplating clearly unsustainable relationships across massive age gaps, though Melli does at least have the excuse of genuine innocence, and Seidl treats her in a remarkably protective fashion given the indignities usually meted out to his protagonists. (Since Lenz was herself only 13, and the other teenagers equally underage in real life, there may well have been legal factors underpinning Seidl's uncharacteristic restraint.)

As before, Seidl and his regular cinematographers Ed Lachman and Wolfgang

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Ulrich Seidl
Screenplay
Ulrich Seidl
Veronika Franz
Cinematographers
Wolfgang Thaler
Ed Lachman
Editor
Christof Schertenleib
Production Designers
Andreas Donhauser
Renate Martin
Sound
Ekkehart Baumung

Costume Designer
Tanja Hausner

©Ulrich Seidl Film
Produktion, Tatfilm,
Parisienne de
Production, ARTE
France Cinéma
Production Companies
A Ulrich Seidl Film
Produktion in
co-production with
Tatfilm, Parisienne
de Production
A film by Ulrich Seidl

Sponsored by
Österreichisches
Filminstitut/
Filmfonds Wien/
Eurimages/
Abteilung Kunst und
Kultur des Landes
Niederösterreich/
Centre National du
Cinéma et de l'Image
Animée/MEDIA
Programme of the
European Union
Co-produced by
Tatfilm and Parisienne
de Production/

ORF (Film/
Fernsehaktionen)/
ARTE France
Cinéma/WDR ARTE/
ARD Degeto

Cast
Melanie Lenz
Melanie, 'Melli'
Joseph Lorenz
doctor
Verena Lehbauer
Verena
Johanna Schmid
Johanna, 'Hanni'

Michael Thomas
sports coach
Vivian Bartsch
Lilly, dietician
Maria Hofstätter
Anna Maria,
Melanie's aunt

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Soda Pictures

Austrian/German
theatrical title
Paradies: Hoffnung

Austria, present day. Anna Maria drops her 13-year-old niece Melanie ('Melli') off at a diet camp for overweight teenagers, where she will spend the summer doing vigorous exercise and learning about healthy eating. Melli quickly makes friends with Verena, with whom she discusses her limited sexual experience, and develops a crush on the camp's doctor, concocting various fictitious ailments as an excuse for visiting his consulting room on a daily basis. Evenings are spent raiding the kitchen or having late-night 'spin the bottle' parties, at least until the participants are discovered and disciplined by the staff. Though clearly aware of Melli's designs on him, the doctor opts to do nothing, and when she lures

him into the woods during an excursion he refuses to do more than hug her and kiss the top of her head. Later, he pointedly rebuffs her when she tries to get into his car. Melli and Verena sneak out at night to visit a nightclub, where they get very drunk. One of the club's denizens, Willi, is about to take advantage when he and his friend are thrown out by the owner, who realises that the girls must be from the camp and are probably underage. He calls the doctor, who drives Melli into the woods, lays her out in a clearing and chastely lies down next to her. Back at the camp, he orders her not to see him again. A sobbing Melli leaves a phone message for her mother, Teresa, who is holidaying in Kenya.



Pumped-up kicks: the band in signature balaclavas, in Mike Lerner and Maxim Pozdorovkin's documentary *Pussy Riot: A Punk Prayer*

Pussy Riot A Punk Prayer

United Kingdom/USA 2013

Directors: Mike Lerner and Maxim Pozdorovkin

Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

In the few days between the American television premiere of *Pussy Riot: A Punk Prayer* on HBO and the British theatrical premiere at Sheffield Doc/Fest, the Russian Duma passed, with a 436-0 vote, a draconian version of the UK's Section 28, which forbade the 'promotion of homosexuality'. The Russian legislation, which includes steep fines, was followed by the introduction of a new law advising jail sentences of up to three years for 'offending religious feelings', clearly based on the Pussy Riot precedent: in 2012, three members of the Pussy Riot feminist collective – Nadezhda (Nadya) Tolokonnikova, Maria Alyokhina and Ekaterina (Katya) Samutsevich – were arrested and tried after performing a 'punk prayer' in Moscow's Christ the Saviour Cathedral, wearing their signature outfits of neon tights, dresses and balaclavas.

Mike Lerner and Maxim Pozdorovkin's documentary is thus poised between documenting the political motivation for Pussy Riot's protests and the equally political motivation for the band's trial and sentencing. Through interviews with the arrested band members' parents, partners and lawyers, as well as a necessarily brief and secretive collective interview with Pussy Riot members still at large, the film conveys how deliberate, informed and

urgent were the band's provocations to the status quo. At the same time it shows how savage and disproportionate was the reaction, even as the band and their supporters understood, highlighted and challenged the disproportionate savagery of Vladimir Putin's exercise of power.

Through vignettised interjections, the film also usefully – if briefly – locates the band's performance and trial within 20th-century Russian history, including the Soviet attack on the Russian Orthodox Church and the Stalinist show trials. Despite these nuggets, the broader human-rights context and anti-Putin struggle, including the fight against incremental anti-LGBT legal changes, is only audible in the band's lyrics – their punk prayer begins, prophetically: "Gay pride sent to Siberia in chains."

The imprisonment and trial of the three arrested band members galvanised international attention, and thus presents both the subject of the film and its main challenge, since no direct interviews with Nadya, Maria or Katya are possible. The documentary tantalises the viewer with the possibility of hearing from them in its pre-credit sequence, but the information throughout derives mainly from interviews (largely talking heads) with Nadya's father Andrei and husband Peter, Katya's father Stanislav and Maria's mother Natalia. Due to the secrecy surrounding the band's actions – a continuing concern for the free members – there's very little concrete information about the group's organisation, strategies and communication, and more about the three imprisoned women as individuals:

the kind of depoliticised celebrity their masked performances deliberately sought to avoid.

The film comes alive, unsurprisingly, whenever the band are on screen: as young women artists, they conceived their formation and performances for online broadcast, and the film makes use of their archive of raw digital footage, in which we see them performing on the roofs of various public buildings in Moscow. Their songs – Black Flag-like punk by way of riot grrl – sloganeer with wit and vibrancy, intersecting feminism and revolutionary politics. There's a bittersweet moment when their lawyer Mark comments that a feminist protest would get zero media attention and the band are being tried so harshly because they refuse to play ball with a corrupt legal system – yet this seems manifestly untrue. The band's invocation of Mary as a feminist warrior, and their powerful use of their bodies, seems to be precisely what's so disturbing to the powers that be, and so crucial to the band themselves. When Katya's father tells her that the rest of the group are considering releasing a CD of the songs called *Occupy Red Square*, she quips back from behind bars, "Why not *Kill All Sexists*?" This is the truly radical aspect of the band that the western media has smoothed out – and which the film partially reveals.

The band's background stories, albeit sentimentalised by Ken Burns-effect photomontages, make clear their emergence from feminist politics and conceptual art: at the trial, Katya stresses her training at the prestigious avant-garde Rodchenko Art School, mounting an aesthetic as well as philosophical

defence of the punk-prayer performance. Footage from *Kiss a Cop* and the Timiryazev State Biological Museum orgy, two earlier projects by the collective Voina (which included members of Pussy Riot), highlight the relation of their work to international performance art, and moreover the serious commitment with which the artists put their bodies on the line.

In their opening and concluding statements at the trial, the band members show the same courage and commitment: rejecting the authority of the court, they cannily uncover the performative nature of the trial and turn it to their advantage, even when the judge becomes aware and silences them. Given the brutal effectiveness of this silencing – two-year sentences in distant penal colonies, with no media oversight, for Nadya and Maria, and a highly restricted release for Katya – it seems odd that the filmmakers devote significant amounts of time to airing the opinions of prosecutors and Orthodox protesters. While the classic BBC model of ‘balance’ has many virtues, in this case amplifying the state’s (already loud) opinion threatens to drown out the rationale for, and method of, the band’s protests. Of course, when a bearded protester tells the camera that the “best translation [for Pussy Riot] is ‘deranged vaginas’”, or the prosecutor says that the band show up liberals as “intolerant fascists”, the viewer does have the sense of the speakers being given just enough rope.

A more creative approach to the limitations of available Pussy Riot material might have been to include more footage from the Pussy Riot-inspired protests and performances around the world. Brief clips of Yoko Ono, Madonna and Peaches, and flashes of online and live protests, fail to convey the scale of the international grassroots feminist movement actively encouraged by the band. “Anybody can take on this image... Write a song, some music, and think of a good place to perform,” they say in their first online communiqué. It’s this thread of democratising protest that forms the most fascinating aspect of the film: seeing the band assembling for rehearsal,

The film shows how deliberate, informed and urgent were the band’s provocations to the status quo, how savage and disproportionate the reaction



Raising the roof: a Pussy Riot performance in Red Square

clambering down buildings, dividing up lyrics for performance and discussing political theory offers a brief but thrilling guide for actual and potential activists who will be drawn to this documentary.

Although coherent and clear, the film struggles with a new issue of the digital era: it can add little to the well-publicised documentation of the performance, trial, appeal and international response that’s already freely available. Its exclusive access to family members and anti-Pussy Riot protesters and its brief historical vignettes form a well-executed framework for that material, but there is little wider analysis or inventive response to Pussy Riot’s own programme beyond excerpting their videos. Of course, the argument stands that a well-made conventional documentary will reach broader audiences and engage them in the issues, and – with its night shots of Moscow, noodly electronica and talking heads – the documentary slips down easily. Despite a few onscreen pop-ups, however, it doesn’t make clever use of Twitter to expand its reach and reveal more of the band’s manifesto in the way that Alison Klayman’s *Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry* (2012) did.

And yet, by including images of Alexander Rodchenko’s posters featuring Lilya Brik, the film acknowledges the 20th-century history of Russian radical art and agrees that Pussy Riot take their place within it. In her statement in court, Katya acknowledges that “there was some culture shock due to the nature of our performance”,

and it’s hard not to feel that the film could have extended that shock, as advised by Sergei Eisenstein, either through a more classical observational documentary à la Kim Longinotto or an Adam Curtis-style digital montage.

“I don’t want to just be a background image,” Nadya comments as the band members analyse the media pack’s behaviour in the courtroom. With its conventional and individualising narrative (including the almost-happy ending of Katya’s release), the film occasionally risks pushing all that the band stand for into the background – but it is utterly worth seeing to glimpse Pussy Riot in their full and flagrant glory. Focusing on these sections inclines the viewer to punch the air along with Nadya, as she leaves court for the prison van, shouting, “We’ve brought the revolution closer!” 🇷🇺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Mike Lerner
Maxim Pozdorovkin
Director of Photography
Antony Butts
Editors
Esteban Uyarra
Simon Barker
Pax Wassermann
Original Music
Simon Russell
Sound Mix/Editor
Chris Bertolotti

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Production Companies
HBO Documentary

Films presents Goldcrest Films and Roast Beef Productions
In association with BBC, Bertha/BRITDOC
A film by Mike Lerner, Maxim Pozdorovkin
Executive Producers
Martin Herring
Havana Marking for BBC:
Nick Fraser, Kate Townsend
for Bertha Britdoc
Foundation:
Maxyne Franklin
for DR:

Mette Hoffman Meyer
for Goldcrest Films
International:
Nick Quested
Christina Willoughby

In Colour
[178:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Independent Distribution

On 21 February 2012, members of the Russian feminist collective Pussy Riot performed a ‘punk prayer’ entitled ‘Virgin Mary, Drive Putin Out’ in the Christ the Saviour Cathedral in Moscow. Their protest against the union of church and state was part of a series of anti-authoritarian performances in the city, including *Kiss a Cop*. Subsequently, band members Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, Maria Alyokhina and Ekaterina Samutsevich were arrested and tried on a count of ‘religious hooliganism’ after six Orthodox worshippers apparently contacted a lawyer. The show trial spread the band’s message, inspiring similar performances worldwide. Despite international censure of the trial – during which the three band members were kept in a glass cage in the courtroom – the court handed down two-year sentences to a penal colony. Samutsevich, freed on appeal, has vowed to keep the pussy riot alive.




Protesting against the protesters: an Orthodox anti-Pussy Riot demonstration

Admission

Director: Paul Weitz
Certificate 12A 107m 13s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Uneasily poised between drama and comedy, *Admission* can't muster enough of either to make an impact, despite its smart social satire. At its best when mercilessly skewering the desperation of Ivy League applicants and their families ("They think that acceptance is the final referendum on their parenting skills"), this romcom-slash-momcom winds up slight and faintly nonsensical.

Closely resembling director Paul Weitz's previous *About a Boy* (2002) in its story of an emotionally stunted adult rescued by reluctant love for an eccentric kid, it proffers contrived plotting and limp gags where its predecessor had warmth and wit. Romantic leads Tina Fey and Paul Rudd trot out the respectively uptight and amiable personas they've honed in similar movies, and little more. Only Lily Tomlin's hilariously hardcore-feminist mother and Wallace Shawn's blowhard dean of admissions mine some sly humour from the proceedings. 

Tina Fey,
Paul Rudd

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Paul Weitz
Kerry Kohansky-Roberts
Written by
Andrew Miano
Karen Croner
Based on the novel by Jean Hanff Korelitz
Director of Photography
Declan Quinn
Edited by
Joan Sobel
Production Designer
Sarah Knowles
Music
Stephen Trask
Sound Mixer
Thomas Varga
Costume Designer

Aude Bronson-Howard
@TBC
Production Companies
Focus Features
presents a Depth of Field production
A Paul Weitz film
Executive Producer
Caroline Baron

Cast

Tina Fey
Portia Nathan
Paul Rudd
John Pressman
Michael Sheen
Professor Mark
Wallace Shawn
Clarence, dean

of admissions
Nat Wolff
Jeremiah
Gloria Reuben
Corinne
Travis Spears
Nelson
Lily Tomlin
Susannah,
Portia's mother

Dolby Digital/
Datasat
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures
International
UK & Eire

9,676 ft +8 frames

US, present day. Uptight Princeton admissions officer Portia is invited by teacher and former college classmate John to meet Jeremiah, an eccentric but brilliant high-school student. John believes Jeremiah to be the son Portia gave up for adoption in college. Portia gradually becomes convinced that she is his mother. John and Portia develop a bond. Jeremiah applies to Princeton. John and Portia sleep together. To counteract Jeremiah's uneven grade history and unconventional CV, Portia resorts to manipulating her colleagues in an attempt to get him admitted. Failing narrowly, she alters the college computer system to send him an offer that another student has rejected. Portia resigns, but the college honours the offer. Portia confesses to Jeremiah that she is his birth mother. But his blurry photocopied birth certificate shows the wrong time of birth – he has already met his real birth mother. Portia starts dating John. She applies to meet the son she put up for adoption but finds that he's not yet ready to meet her.

After Earth

USA 2013
Director: M. Night Shyamalan
Certificate 12A 99m 55s



Crash landing: Will Smith

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

"What was your mistake? Trusting in me, depending on me, thinking I could do this?" This is Jaden Smith's big scene in *After Earth*, his *cri de coeur*. He is playing Kitai, the son of the most famous general on Nova Prime (humanity's post-Earth home planet), who has long lived in the chill of his father's shadow. The general, Cypher, is played by Jaden's father Will, who has risen from humble West Philadelphia beginnings to become one of the most powerful players in movies.

Though the closing credits reveal – twist ending! – that *After Earth* was in fact directed and co-written by M. Night Shyamalan in for-hire mode, the basic elements of the plot originated with Smith, and he's the nearest thing to the film's architect and author. His motive is plain. Smith has been endeavouring to pass the sceptre of fame to his second-born son since co-starring eight-year-old Jaden in

2006's *The Pursuit of Happyness*, while 2010's Will-produced remake of *The Karate Kid* was less a realised film than a feature-length demo reel, a full-page *Variety* ad. All this is, of course, no more coarse a public-relations conspiracy than the sort that happens every day in showbiz, but the ongoing effort to strong-arm America (and the world) into a love affair with Jaden Smith has rightly resulted in a backlash of resentment.

Smith's filmography doesn't include a pile of masterpieces commensurate with his clout, but there was never any question that he had talent, could make himself felt by an audience. This was evident as early as the "How come he don't want me, man?" breakdown in *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, and proven again in the one-man-show of *I Am Legend* (2007). In *After Earth*, however, Will seems to have decided that for Jaden's star to increase, his own legend must decrease. By choice, the most bankable action star alive spends most of

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Caleb Pinkett
Jada Pinkett Smith
Will Smith
James Lassiter
M. Night Shyamalan
Screenplay
Gary Whitta
M. Night Shyamalan
Story
Will Smith
Director of Photography
Peter Suschitzky

Editor
Steven Rosenblum
Production Designer
Tom Sanders
Music
James Newton Howard
Sound Mixer
Tod Maitland
Costume Designer
Amy Westcott
Visual Effects/
Character Animation
Tippett Studio

Visual Effects
Iloura
Pixomondo
Spy
Svengali FX
Dive
Ollin VFX
Stunt Co-ordinators
Chad Stahelski
R.A. Rondell
©Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc.
Production

Companies
Columbia Pictures presents an Overbrook Entertainment production
A Blinding Edge Pictures production
A film by M. Night Shyamalan
Executive Producer
E. Bennett Walsh

Cast
Jaden Smith
Kitai Raige
Will Smith
Cypher Raige
Zoë Isabella Kravitz
Senshi Raige
Sophie Okonedo
Faia Raige
Glenn Morshower
Commander Velan
Kristofer Hivju
security chief

Dolby Digital/
SDDS/Datasat
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures
Releasing

8,992 ft +8 frames

A thousand years in the future. Earth has been rendered uninhabitable by environmental catastrophe, and humanity has emigrated to the planet Nova Prime, which is plagued by voracious monsters called Ursas; these beasts hunt humans by tracking the smell of their fear. The most esteemed of the human warriors is Cypher, leader of the Ranger Corps, who is able to make himself invisible to the Ursas through his total lack of fear – a technique known as 'ghosting'. Cypher's son Kitai doesn't have his father's mettle, and has just failed his Ranger Corps entrance exam. Their relationship has been strained since the young Kitai passively watched as his sister was killed by an Ursa; nevertheless, Cypher decides to invite Kitai along with him on a routine mission. En route,

their spaceship is caught in a meteor storm and crash-lands on Earth. Cypher and Kitai are the only survivors; Cypher's legs are broken in the crash and so, to find the missing rescue beacon, Kitai must travel alone across 100 kilometres of rugged terrain populated by hostile beasts. Cypher coaches his son through the first leg of his journey; using radio and surveillance technology, he helps Kitai to make his way past murderous baboons and toxic leeches. When communication between them breaks down, Kitai is left on his own to face an Ursa that was set loose on Earth when their vessel crashed. In the heat of combat, he learns to 'ghost' and vanquishes his foe.

The beacon summons help just in time to rescue the injured Cypher.

The Battle of the Sexes

United Kingdom 2013
Directors: James Erskine, Zara Hayes
Certificate PG 82m 58s

Reviewed by Thomas Dawson

"Pigs are dead, long live the king," declared one American newspaper the day after Billie Jean King had comfortably beaten the self-styled 'male chauvinist pig' Bobby Riggs in the 'Battle of the Sexes' tennis match held at Texas's Houston Astrodome in March 1973.

British writer-director James Erskine, whose previous sporting documentaries include *One Night in Turin* (about the England football team's Italia 90 campaign) and *From the Ashes* (on the 1981 England-Australia cricket series), successfully contextualises the match between King and Riggs and its media spectacle within the broader struggle for female liberation in early-1970s America (1973 was the very year of the landmark Roe v. Wade Supreme Court abortion ruling). King herself emerges from this crisply packaged film (released to coincide with the Wimbledon tournament) not just as a great tennis champion but also as a driving force in the establishment of a professional female tour and the campaign for equal pay for women players. The rather rushed coda – a drawback of the modest running time – sketches the considerable debt that the likes of Venus and Serena Williams and Maria Sharapova owe to King's pioneering work four decades ago. 📺



Courting controversy: Billie Jean King

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Victoria Gregory
James Erskine
Written by
James Erskine
Zara Hayes
Director of Photography
Joel Devlin
Editor
Adam Recht
Production Designer
Toby Stevens
Original Music
Christopher
Nicolas Bangs
Location Sound
Recordists
Richard Miller
Jim Wrocklage

Andrew Burgess
Jack Norflus
Sandy Fellerman
Costume Designer
Francisco
Rodriguez-Weil

©New Black
Films Ltd
Production Companies
Kaleidoscope
Entertainment
presents a New
Black Films and
Media Squared Films
PLC production
A James Erskine/
Zara Hayes film
Executive Producers

Robert Jolliffe
Billie Jean King

Reconstruction Cast
Lyndall Grant
Margaret Court
Alexandra Jones
Billie Jean King
Peter Russell
Bobby Riggs

In Colour

Distributor
Kaleidoscope Film
Distribution

7,467 ft +0 frames

A documentary about the globally televised 'Battle of the Sexes' tennis match between Billie Jean King, then Wimbledon women's singles champion, and Bobby Riggs, a 55-year-old former top player and self-styled tennis hustler, in March 1973. The match was staged at the Houston Astrodome in Texas, in front of a crowd of more than 30,000 spectators. Drawing on archive footage, interviews with participants and dramatic reconstructions, the film places this contest – which King won by 3 sets to 0 – within the wider struggle for female liberation.

Blackfish

USA 2013
Director: Gabriela Cowperthwaite

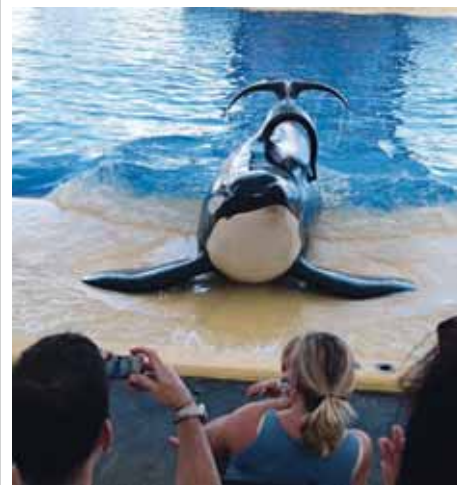
Reviewed by Thomas Dawson

Watching director Gabriela Cowperthwaite's second feature documentary – she previously made *City Lax: An Urban Lacrosse Story* (2010) – it's surprising to learn that its principal subject, a five-tonne orca whale named Tilikum, is himself the victim of bullying. Out in the ocean he might swim a hundred miles a day, preying on seals, sea lions and walruses; in captivity, however, having been separated from his family and confined to concrete tanks in marine parks, he finds his skin being repeatedly raked by the younger, more agile females sharing his confined quarters.

The orca – Native American fishermen refer to this species as 'blackfish' – has a considerable cinematic pedigree. The sensationalist adventure yarn *Orca* (1977) had Richard Harris and Charlotte Rampling hunting down the titular beast, while the child-friendly *Free Willy* (1993) involved an orphaned 12-year-old setting free the killer whale who saved his life. And last year's *Rust and Bone* saw Marion Cotillard's whale trainer lose her legs in an orca attack.

Yet one of the key points in the skilfully assembled *Blackfish* is that there have been no recorded incidents of orcas attacking humans in the wild. In other words, it's the very conditions under which the likes of Tilikum are imprisoned that make these animals so dangerous. Their life-expectancy is vastly reduced by being held in SeaWorld-style establishments, where they are deprived of stimulation, causing their dorsal fins to collapse, and where they undergo behaviour therapy so that they can be trained to perform tricks for paying audiences. The scientific interviewees here attest to the sentient qualities of these mammals, pointing out their capacity for intelligent communication: in one of the most wrenching sequences, we hear the piercing sound of whale cries when the parent animals are separated from their offspring. Further visual ammunition for Cowperthwaite's argument is provided by striking archive footage from 1970 of the mass abduction of baby orcas in the Puget Bay area of the Pacific.

Cowperthwaite, drawing on the testimonies of several former employees, paints a damning portrait of the SeaWorld corporation, which refused her requests for interviews. The filmmaker effectively contrasts the



The kids and the whale: 'Blackfish'

his latest movie flat on his back. Cypher nods in and out of consciousness from blood loss after the spaceship in which father and son are travelling crash-lands on off-limits planet Earth; when able, he remotely coaches his son out in the field, passing along such nuggets of advice as "Danger is very real but fear is a choice" and "Root yourself in this present moment" and "Recognise your power, this will be your creation." These tidbits have been cited as proof that Smith has gone over to the dark side: Scientology. I don't know enough about L. Ron Hubbard's doctrine to speculate as to whether or not that's so, but during these scenes I did find myself idly wondering what the movie would have been like if the advice had been read from Oblique Strategies cards instead. Regardless, this touchy-feely, action-as-therapy approach doesn't inspire a great deal of hope in Smith's proposed modern-dress remake of Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* deathtrip.

As his unnervingly full-contact *Karate Kid* proved, barely pubescent Jaden is credible when kept in motion, a fleet physical presence when, say, being pursued by CG baboons across the multiform terrain of an abandoned Earth where no trace of humanity has been left behind. And such terrain! Veteran cinematographer Peter Suschitzky is working largely in hi-res 4K digital here – new tech shown to advantage in scenes that articulate the chaos within the spaceship's destroyed hull – and the film has moments of considerable exotic wonderment in digitally sweetened outdoor sequences. As Hollywood continues compulsively to reboot and recycle pop mythologies, some credit is at least due to the personnel here for trying to invent something new from thin air, even if the results are rather, well, thin.

Jaden, though game, is a charmless actor when he pauses before the camera, outshone by his father even when Will is at his most deferential and withdrawn. It makes Jaden's "What was your mistake?" touching in a way the whingeing delivery can't account for – he *can't* do this. Rather than being drawn into Kitai's struggle towards manhood, one only feels slightly impatient with his failures. Smith *père's* demeanour throughout is a combination of the bland and distantly inconsolable. He is rushing towards middle-age gravitas; his jawline looks heavier, even burdensome, while the tension of long-repressed tears is ever detectable around his eyes. He can't help but be the most interesting thing on screen here, not that he's given himself anything to work with.

Other than his fearlessness, only fleetingly glimpsed on the field of battle, Cypher's sole character trait is a fondness for *Moby Dick*. (Apparently no other novels of note were written in the thousand After Earth years.) This preference never opens the door to any revelation of Cypher's character, though the humps of cresting whales appear in the film's last image, as though significant of something, and the ivory-ribbed interior of the spacecraft – the overarching art-direction aesthetic is futurist-organic – looks like the belly of the whale. This is conflating Ahab and Jonah, a confusion typical of a half-baked fable, a feeble fable that is much more White Elephant than White Whale. 📺

↑ upbeat, sanitised nature of SeaWorld's TV advertising with shocking footage of whale-on-human attacks in marine parks, taken both by employees and by members of the public present at these incidents. The company's tactic after each fatality is to blame 'human error' on the part of the trainers rather than to instigate any deeper investigation into how orcas are affected by captivity. That Tilikum has been able to sire numerous calves, sometimes through artificial insemination, makes him even more financially valuable to an organisation hoping to float on the New York Stock Exchange at time of writing.

Yet *Blackfish* can also be considered an examination of how youthful innocence gives way to middle-aged disillusion. SeaWorld relies on the fact that there are plenty of enthusiastic youngsters who dream of working with marine mammals. Various ex-trainers admit they were hired not for their scientific knowledge but for their ability to be extrovert and look good in a swimsuit. SeaWorld didn't share with them details of attacks such as the one that led to the death of young trainer Keltie Byrne at the Canadian Sealand in 1991, and instead presented them with dubious claims about how captivity benefits animals. And although Jeff Beal's score is a little overemphatic in tugging at the heartstrings, Cowperthwaite provides an ending that satisfyingly connects *Blackfish*'s different strands, as former trainers travel on a boat to watch a group of orcas in their natural habitat. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Manuel V. Oteyza	Jeff Stone	Part-subtitled
Producer Gabriela Cowperthwaite	©Our Turn Productions, LLC	Distributor Dogwoof
Written by Gabriela Cowperthwaite	Production Companies Our Turn Productions presents a film by Gabriela Cowperthwaite	
Co-writer Tim Zimmermann	Produced by Manny O Productions	
Cinematography Jonathan Ingalls	Executive Producers Judy Bart	
Edited by Eli Despres	Erica Kahn	
Music Composed by Jeff Beal	Rick Brookwell	
Location Sound	In Colour [1.78:1]	

A documentary about Tilikum, a performing orca whale that has been responsible for the deaths of three people at marine parks in Canada and the US over the past 22 years. The film incorporates interviews with former marine-animal trainers, the relatives of individuals killed in whale attacks, scientific researchers and OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) employees, together with archive footage, including images taken by staff and tourists of fatal incidents at SeaWorld establishments.

Captured off the coast of Iceland in 1983 and separated from his biological family, Tilikum has grown to weigh more than five tonnes and still performs regularly for crowds at SeaWorld in Florida. It was here that a homeless man was found dead in Tilikum's tank in July 1999, and where in February 2010 the whale killed one of his regular handlers, the experienced trainer Dawn Brancheau.

Black Rock

USA 2012
Director: Katie Aselton
Certificate 15 79m 44s

Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

There's nothing wrong with subverting a formula – and it's a fair bet that's what actor-director Katie Aselton had in mind with this survival thriller about three warring women trapped on an island infested with psychopathic killers. The genre rules are clear – lean heavily on action and forget about character development – but Aselton (and husband Mark Duplass, who scripted) try to fill in the psychological gaps by stressing the troubled triangular friendship between apple-cheeked Sarah (Kate Bosworth), her rudderless pal Lou (Lake Bell) and bitter Abby (Aselton), who can't forgive Lou for sleeping with her boyfriend years before.

Unfortunately, when their bonding weekend is interrupted by three troubled ex-soldiers who quickly erupt into all-out homicidal craziness, any psychological integrity dissolves in a mess of ludicrous implausibility. The men's bizarre state of mind is lazily written off as some kind of post-traumatic thing, while the action is regularly interrupted for the women to disrobe, hug, cry or blether on about their feelings, leaving the audience in an uncomfortable limbo, irritated by the overcooked emoting and rather hoping for a bit more splatter.

A pity, since the first act builds tension nicely – but it's hard to imagine how this strange tonal mix was ever going to work. Ⓢ



Carrion camping: Katie Aselton

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Adele Romanski	©Black Rock the Movie, LLC	Louise Foster, 'Lou'
Screenplay Mark Duplass	Production Companies LD Entertainment presents an Amesbury production A Katie Aselton film	Kate Bosworth Sarah Whitfield
Story Katie Aselton	Executive Producers Mark Duplass	Will Bouvier Henry Wallace
Director of Photography Hillary Spera	Producers Jay Duplass	Jay Paulson Derek
Editor Jacob Vaughan	Costume Designer Mickey Liddell	Anslem Richardson Alex
Production Designer Erin Staub	Cast Katie Aselton	In Colour [1.85:1]
Original Score Ben Lovett	Abby Turner	Distributor Metrodome Distribution Ltd
Location Sound Mixer Micah Bloomberg	Lake Bell	7,176 ft +0 frames

US, the present. Former schoolmates Sarah, Lou and Abby attempt to renew their tattered friendship by going on a camping trip to an uninhabited island off the coast of Maine. They are surprised to encounter three recently returned war veterans on a hunting trip, one of whom is accidentally killed by Abby when he tries to rape her. When the other two ex-soldiers attempt to take violent revenge, the girls must bury their differences to survive. Sarah is shot but Abby and Lou manage to kill both men and escape.

Blood

United Kingdom/USA 2012
Director: Nick Murphy
Certificate 15 92m 10s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Calling a film *Blood*, with its evident suggestions of deep familial bonds (and, of course, the carnage required to sustain a procedural drama), lays down a challenge to the casting department, since the viewer obviously needs to believe that the relevant cast members are indeed related. In this instance, however, Paul Bettany's blue-eyed patrician hauteur definitely seems spawned from an entirely different gene pool from that of his onscreen sibling and fellow Wirral-based detective, the stocky, proletarian pocket-battleship that is Stephen Graham. Hence credibility is dented from scene one, even before Brian Cox appears as their gruff father, a former police department head now struggling with creeping senility. We might buy him as Graham's old man, certainly not Bettany's, though more of a concern as the drama progresses is how Cox's capricious memory seems to come and go at the screenwriter's convenience, all too readily signposting a key role for the veteran cop in the story's resolution.

What with sibling tensions, parental influence and changing policing methods, there's no shortage of material here, centred around the central plot twist in which Bettany kills a paedophile suspect in a fit of rage, with Graham and Cox key witnesses to the event. All this supports the dramatic playing out of writer Bill Gallagher's contention that the perpetrator of a crime also suffers when unable to confess their wrongdoing, quite a lot to take on board. Sadly, the result feels over-plotted and under-characterised, lacking time to breathe and establish the sort of empathy that would give some emotional or even moral weight to the proceedings. In the end it comes across like so much of a superficial skim-through that it's little surprise to learn that it actually originated as a six-hour drama, *Conviction*, first transmitted by the BBC in 2004 and also written by Gallagher, whose script won the Golden Nymph at the Monte-Carlo Television Festival.

To be fair, director Nick Murphy works hard to give the piece a cinematic sense of scale – he's perhaps a tad overenthusiastic in his efforts to apply a unifying colour scheme of murky greys-greens but makes impressive use of his Wirral



Blood brothers: Paul Bettany, Stephen Graham

Breathe In

USA 2012

Director: Drake Doremus

locations, especially Hilbre Island out in the estuary, a remote spot where, Cox contends, the police used to beat confessions out of their suspects. While Daniel Pemberton's grandiose score appears to have escaped from a Tony Scott film and seems absurdly inflated in these surroundings, Murphy also manages to sneak in some of the subtle spookiness of his 2011 offering *The Awakening* by having the murdered suspect return to haunt the unravelling detective. Actor Ben Crompton's surprise appearances are insidiously effective, as the flawed cop starts an ongoing dialogue with his restless shade. But for all Bettany's intensive efforts, it's Mark Strong's work as his reserved, methodical superior that takes the palm here. He creates frissons of intrigue by not giving very much away – an approach this bustling, workaday thriller might profitably have taken on board to a greater degree. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Pippa Harris Nicola Shindler Nick Laws Written by Bill Gallagher Based on the TV series <i>Conviction</i> written by Bill Gallagher Director of Photography George Richmond Editor Victoria Boydell Production Designer Cristina Casali Composer Daniel Pemberton Production Sound Mixer Colin Nicolson Costume Designer Michele Clapton	BBC Films and BFI present in association with IM Global, Quickfire Films, LipSync Productions a Neal Street/Red production Developed with the assistance of BBC Films Made through the British Film Institute's Film Fund Executive Producers Sam Mendes Andrew Crichtley Christine Langan Stuart Ford James Atherton Michael Roban Norman Merry Peter Hampden Cast Paul Bettany Joe Fairburn Mark Strong Robert Seymoore Stephen Graham	Chrissie Fairburn Brian Cox Lenny Fairburn Naomi Battrick Miriam Fairburn Ben Crompton Jason Bulleigh Natasha Little Lily Fairburn Zoë Tapper Jemma Venn Sandra Voe Sandra Bulleigh Jasper Britton Daniel Heston Adrian Edmondson Tom Tiernan Danny McEvoy Sammy Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1] Distributor E! Films 2,925 ft +0 frames
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The Wirral, present day. Brothers Joe and Chrissie Fairburn are detectives who have long laboured in the shadow of their father Lenny, once the station's tough chief detective and now suffering from Alzheimer's. Investigating the brutal murder of a teenage girl, Joe and Chrissie arrest Jason Bulleigh, a former sex offender and now church volunteer, who's linked to the victim through a bracelet. Lack of hard evidence means that Joe and Chrissie's boss Robert Seymoore forces them to release Jason. They decide to take a leaf out of their father's book and drive Jason to a nearby island to extract a confession. Joe loses his temper and accidentally kills Jason. Lenny is with them and also witnesses the killing. When new evidence shows that Jason was innocent of the crime, Robert tracks down the real culprits – a pair of teenage boys who committed the murder in a local abandoned cinema. When Jason is reported missing, Chrissie tries to keep cool but Joe can't live with himself, confessing the crime to his fiancée Jemma. Lenny's erratic memory now becomes a liability. Robert begins to surmise what happened, and has his suspicions confirmed when Jason's charred body is discovered. Lenny turns himself in and confesses to killing Jason himself. Joe is forced to admit his culpability, overheard by Robert and the other detectives. He faces arrest and trial.

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

When the Reynolds family pose for the photograph they'll send out with their annual bulletin for friends and relatives, is it a declaration of contentment with their upstate New York middle-class domesticity? Or perhaps a determined act to will such contentment – or even the appearance thereof – into being? Drake Doremus's sharp sense of how certain quotidian moments offer telling insights is illustrated by this astute opening sequence in his fifth feature, the prelude to further scene-setting suggesting that the Reynoldses' marriage has settled into the continuity of routine, only just bridging the gap between the creative aspirations of Guy Pearce's indie rocker turned music teacher and Amy Ryan's determined homemaker, evidently wary of where her husband's frustrated musical ambitions may take the family stability she values so much. The real crunch, however, is set in motion by the arrival of an exchange student from England, since the film cannily ensures that Felicity Jones's attractive interloper conveys enough of the misunderstood would-be artist to have Pearce wondering if he's at last discovered a true soulmate.

Here, as in his previous output, including the youthful 2011 romance *Like Crazy*, Doremus worked from an outline scenario within which he trusted the actors to improvise their dialogue. Pearce, Jones and Ryan avoid that slightly baggy or strenuously overstated feel that's easy to spot when improv's done badly, and their assurance contributes to the film's main strength, creating a believable set of people and places – from the lived-in family house at the centre of the action to the school where Pearce tries hard to be the cool teacher and his daughter (Mackenzie Davis) anxiously negotiates the tricky challenges of the teenage dating-game. Even downtown NYC, ever promising cultural fulfilment and liberating anonymity, is an effective offscreen presence.



Inhale and hearty: Guy Pearce

Still, while it's clear that Doremus and his co-writer Ben York Jones have put a lot of thought into mapping these overlapping lives, there are some awkward miscalculations – notably the short shrift given to slightly shrill spouse Ryan and her fascination with collecting ceramic cookie jars, and an unlikely subplot in which Pearce's occasional subbing in the cello section of a second-rank New York symphony orchestra somehow puts him in the frame for a full-time post. Getting his plot to mesh with place and character seems to be a bugbear for Doremus, since *Like Crazy* struggled over the details of a US visa problem to separate its lovers, and in this case there's a grinding transition from low-key observational intrigue to full-on final-reel melodrama when he's simply too obvious in bringing the characters' individual dilemmas to a combined crisis point.

It's a pity, really, to end with such misgivings when there's much useful and intelligent material here, leaving one to wonder if Doremus's somewhat novelistic skills aren't actually a natural match for a compact 90-minute feature. Might the unfolding momentum of a cable TV series be a more productive context for him in future? **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Jonathan Schwartz Andrea Sperling Steven Rales Mark Roybal Written by Drake Doremus Ben York Jones Director of Photography John Guleserian Edited by Jonathan Alberts Production Designer Katie Byron Music Dustin O'Halloran Sound Mixer Stephen Nelson Costume Designer Emma Potter	Filmed with the support of The New York State Governor's Office for Motion Picture & Television Development Cast Guy Pearce Keith Reynolds Felicity Jones Sophie Amy Ryan Megan Reynolds Mackenzie Davis Lauren Reynolds Matthew Daddario Aaron Ben Shenkman Sheldon Ali Wentworth Wendy Sebeck Nathaniel Peart Blake Sebeck Hugo Becker Clement Shannon Garland Lainey Sebeck Elise Eberle Angela Nicole Patrick Theresa	<i>[uncredited]</i> Kyle MacLachlan Peter Sebeck Dolby Digital/ Datasat/SDDS In Colour [2.35:1] Distributor Curzon Film World
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Upstate New York, present day. Keith Reynolds feels stuck in his job, teaching music at the high school where his daughter Lauren is a pupil; his marriage has also fallen into routine. He views with nostalgia his youthful days as a struggling rock musician, though his wife Megan is glad they've left that life behind. Keith's occasional performances in the cello section of a New York symphony orchestra provide him with a creative outlet.

The Reynolds household's equilibrium is altered by the arrival of Sophie, a British foreign-exchange student. She seems more mature than Lauren and her classmates, and dazzles Keith and his students with a startling Chopin performance. Keith begins to see her as a fellow artist and outsider, and the two become close. Sophie upsets Lauren by going clubbing in New York with Aaron, a boy Lauren is keen on. After Sophie refuses Aaron's advances, he boasts to the school that she slept with him. Sophie seeks refuge in Keith's arms – only for Lauren to spot them embracing. When Keith lands a full-time job in the orchestra's cello section, he sees it as a chance to escape suburban conformity and plans to elope with Sophie. Lauren, distraught at Aaron's rejection, is badly injured in a car crash, and Megan, after realising what's been going on between her husband and the visitor, calls him to be at their daughter's bedside. Lauren recovers and Sophie leaves; the family carries on, everyone knowing how close they came to dissolution.

The Conjuring

Director: James Wan
Certificate 15 111m 46s

Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

When it comes to professional ghost-hunters, cinema is wont to place tongue in cheek – from the bumbling opportunists of *Ghostbusters* to *Poltergeist*'s hapless team, ultimately shown up by Zelda Rubinstein's clucking, diminutive medium. The goofy operators in director James Wan's *Insidious* (2010) owed a clear debt to the latter, yet this superior follow-up – drawn from the archives of New England-based paranormal investigators Ed and Lorraine Warren – sees Wan playing it straight. The movie's title, renamed from *The Warren Files*, implies showmanship – something the Warrens' detractors would probably accuse them of indulging in. But *The Conjuring*, eager to press on with fine-tuning its abundant scares, eschews any potential play with veracity, asking us – much like the Amityville series, a notable Warren file – to take events at face value.

A barnstorming late-1960s-set prologue has the Warrens (Patrick Wilson and Vera Farmiga) called to a Rhode Island apartment, where they calmly inform petrified residents that a hideous, seemingly sentient doll is not in fact possessed by a murdered girl but being used as a conduit by a demon. 'Annabelle' – a reminder, after *Saw* (2004) and *Dead Silence* (2007), of Wan and long-time production designer Julie Berghoff's fixation with grotesque puppetry – is promptly confiscated and locked up in the Warrens' kitschy 'haunted objects' room (a green light for Wan to send his ghost-train *mise en scène* into overdrive).

Some years later, having withdrawn from assignments following a traumatic exorcism, the Warrens are persuaded to help the Perrons, a family of seven whose rural farmhouse may be haunted by the spirits of a witch and her past victims. The logical solution – simply move out – is dismissed by Ed, who insists that the spectres will follow ("It's like treading in gum"). The real-life Perrons actually stayed put for ten years, though how much of that was spent securing a book deal is anyone's guess.

There's very little about *The Conjuring* that's fresh – its set pieces virtually run the gamut of under-the-bed/behind-the-door/creepy-



From bad to curse: Vera Farmiga

basement frights. Somehow, though, thanks to a shrewd manipulation of screen space and a precise attention to sound that doesn't purely settle for jolting noises, it furnishes its old tricks with considerable potency – a repeated game of 'hide and clap' (recalling the blind-man's-buff motif of *The Orphanage*) is particularly effective. Wan is a slick technician but here he downplays the flashiness, while John R. Leonetti's classical camerawork – often coaxing squirms through stillness and obscured perspective – makes eerie use of the widescreen frame. As if heralded by the fortissimo shriek of atonal brass that opens the film, Wan and his scenarists Chad and Carey Hayes seem hell-bent on cramming their story with as many genre tropes as will fit – devil dolls, witches' curses, possession, exorcisms, premonitions and so on.

What's lacking is any true sense of narrative surprise as the story plays out fairly predictably, despite a rather nonsensical encore by Annabelle late on. Much is made of the fact that Lorraine, fragile and debilitated from her previous experiences, is reluctant to step back into the breach. But this potentially tragic dimension, echoing the fate of *The Exorcist*'s Father Merrin, isn't meaningfully explored. Still, the shocks are delivered with aplomb, even as the movie eventually conforms to type. **S**

Days of Grace

Mexico/USA/France 2011
Director: Everardo Gout

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

The title suggests a religious festival, which isn't far off – Everardo Gout's debut is set during successive football World Cups, when Mexico grinds to a halt and cops and crooks momentarily take their eye off the ball (as it were). Although the attached synopsis presents the film's three stories sequentially, they're tightly interwoven to draw parallels between kidnapping incidents taking place years apart, themselves the tiniest sampling of a problem so endemic that in 2012 it was estimated that there were 72 fresh cases *per day*.

The stories are told from three different perspectives: that of a policeman, a kidnap victim and another's family. The 2002-set story is anchored by a charismatic performance from Tenoch Huerta as what appears to be Mexico City's only honest cop (true, he drives suspects to a desert shack to rough them up, but this is for the greater good). Since early scenes feature the birth of his son, and his wife urging him to put family first, their likely fate is signalled with lighthouse-beam strength – indeed, all the narrative twists are more tragically inevitable than especially surprising, though Gout's adrenaline-rush staging offers plenty of distractions.

We rarely see the face and never know the name of the 2006 story's kidnap victim (Carlos Bardem), though his thoughts are constantly present in voiceover, interspersed with attempts at conversing with his captors – futile when dealing with people who regard him as no more animate than a table but potentially more fruitful when alone with Doroteo (Kristyan Ferrer, equally memorable in 2009's *Sin Nombre*), a football-mad teenager already if unsuccessfully warned off crime by Huerta's Lupe four years earlier.

Doroteo also pops up in the 2010 story, which primarily revolves around a kidnap victim's family – the definition of 'family' being gradually recalibrated as the investigation uncovers hidden aspects of the man's personal life. The heavily pregnant maid Maxi (Doroteo's sister) refuses to name the father, but when the kidnapped businessman Arturo is discovered to have a mistress, it's not hard to add two and two. Dramatically, this is the least compelling of the three stories, possibly because Gout seems less interested in the film's female characters across the board.

Each story was shot using different film stocks and aspect ratios ranging from an ultra-wide 3:1 (2002, shot in 16mm) to a more constricted 1.85:1 (2006, shot in Super 8, 16mm and 35mm to accompany its protagonist's increasing awareness



Life goals: Tenoch Huerta

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Tony DeRosa-Grund Peter Safran Rob Cowan	Kirk Morri Production Designer Julie Berghoff	Production Companies New Line Cinema presents a Safran Company/
Written by Chad Hayes Carey W. Hayes	Music Joseph Bishara	Evergreen Media
Sound Designer Joe Dzuban	Costume Designer Kristin M. Burke	Group production A James Wan film
Director of Photography John Leonetti		Executive Producers Walter Hamada Dave Neustadter
Editor	©[TBC]	

Rhode Island, US, 1971. Roger and Carolyn Perron and their five daughters move into a farmhouse in rural Harrisville. The following morning, the family's dog is found dead. The Perrons experience increasingly violent disturbances and supernatural phenomena: Carolyn suffers inexplicable bruises; the apparition of a gnarled woman terrorises the children; youngest daughter April has visions of a forlorn boy named Rory. Carolyn persuades renowned paranormal investigators Ed and Lorraine Warren – on hiatus after a traumatic case – to investigate. Lorraine learns that a witch, Bathsheba, once lived in the farmhouse. Bathsheba sacrificed her newborn before hanging herself and

Cast Vera Farmiga Lorraine Warren Patrick Wilson Ed Warren Ron Livingston Roger Perron Lili Taylor Carolyn Perron Joey King Christine Perron	Shanley Caswell Andrea Perron Haley McFarland Nancy Perron Mackenzie Foy Cynthia Perron Kyla Deaver April Perron Sterling Jerins Judy Warren Nate Sman	Rory Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1] Distributor Warner Bros Distributors (UK) 10,059 ft +0 frames
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cursing the grounds; a later owner of the property also committed suicide after killing her son, revealed to be Rory. Worried that Bathsheba's spirit intends to manipulate Carolyn into murder, the Warrens gather the visual proof required for an exorcism. Carolyn is possessed by Bathsheba but remains oblivious. While the Perrons move to a motel, the Warrens thwart an attempt by Bathsheba to haunt their own young daughter. Carolyn, now completely overcome by Bathsheba, absconds back to the farmhouse with her two youngest children. Unable to wait for the Vatican's approval, the Warrens successfully perform the exorcism themselves, banishing Bathsheba before Carolyn can kill the children.

The Deep

Iceland/Norway 2012
Director: Baltasar Kormákur
Certificate 12A 92m 44s

Reviewed by Anna Fomicheva

Veteran Icelandic director Baltasar Kormákur's *The Deep* is an adaptation of true events that shook his island nation nearly 30 years ago. In March 1984, in the middle of the night, a fishing boat sank a few miles off the coast of Iceland, taking down the whole crew apart from Gudlaugur Friðþórsson ('Gulli' in the film). Against all odds and scientific sense, he swam for six hours through the freezing waters, eventually reaching one of the Westman Islands, where he walked barefoot across a field of solidified and dangerous lava to safety. The shy and humble Friðþórsson insisted on downplaying the whole incident but was immediately pronounced a national hero and received overwhelming attention from the press and the scientific community, which studied his extraordinarily robust body for months afterwards.

Kormákur was inspired to make the film after seeing a theatrical adaptation of these events, finding in them a perfect metaphor for the Icelandic national character. In interview the director has said that he was interested in exploring what 'fabric' the Icelanders were made of: "Someone performs an inexplicable human feat [and] does not really want to talk about it... This is so close to the national character and I believe it is what makes the story fascinating... This is really a story of a nation." His words strike a particularly poignant note in the aftermath of Iceland's economic meltdown in 2008 and the quietly steady recovery of the past few years, almost unnoticed by the rest of the world.

The film's excellent cinematography and early *mise en scène*, as we are introduced to the fishermen's lives on land and on the fishing boat, serve as a perfect visual embodiment of the traits of the Icelandic character that the director is interested in exploring. The rugged environments, extreme cold, sparse food and other hardships – and the men's obliviousness to them – are communicated concisely and effectively.

In other ways, however, the focus on the overarching symbolism comes at the expense of depth of characterisation and attention to dramatic detail, including dialogue. But it's the



Taking the waves: Olafur Darri Olafsson

self-conscious and awkward lead performance from Olafur Darri Olafsson that's the film's biggest weakness (though this might be a harsh judgement considering the real dangers the actor faced during shooting in the freezing sea where the actual events took place). It isn't helped by the inclusion of corny home-video-style montages of Gulli's childhood; these are intercut with scenes of him struggling in the sea shot in the heightened realistic manner of the rest of the film. The stylistic contrast draws too much attention to the artificiality of the devices and ends suspension of disbelief.

When Gulli starts speaking to seagulls during his six-hour swim, it feels as if the character development is taking a ridiculous turn and at this point I gave up caring. But as the end titles roll we see archive TV footage of the real Gudlaugur Friðþórsson giving an interview in his hospital bed. His account of how talking to seagulls and to God during his swim saved his sanity and his life brought tears to my eyes. This video, just a minute or so long, managed to extract more emotion than had the previous hour and a half. 📺

of his surroundings) and its native 2.35:1 (2010, shot in 35mm). This isn't just a flashy gimmick: it makes the film's narrative strands considerably easier to follow and also justifies a CGI-assisted sequence suggesting that the same room houses all three stories' kidnap victims and many others: as the camera pans around its interior, its furnishings and decor change over time, while the surrounding frame stretches and squeezes. Although it's hard to banish the impression that Gout is a little too intoxicated by the medium's technical possibilities, it's a promising debut. 📺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Leopoldo Gout
Everardo Gout
Luis Sansams
Oscar Ramirez
Gonzalez

Screenplay/Story

Everardo Gout

Director of

Photography

Luis Sansams

Editor

Herve Schneid
Jose Salcedo
Valerio Grautoff

Production

Designer

Bernardo Trujillo

Music

2002:

Nick Cave

Warren Ellis

2006:

Atticus Ross

Claudia Sarne

Leopold Ross

2010:

Shigeru Umebayashi

Robert Del Naja

Tim Goldsworthy

Scarlett Johansson

Sound

Fernando Cámara

Costume Designer

Bertha Romero

©Fondo de Inversión

y Estímulos al Cine

(Fidecine), Días de

Gracia Producciones

S.A. de C.V., Casa B

LLC, Arte Mecánica

Producciones S.A.

de C.V., Arp S.A.S.

Production

Companies

Días de Gracia

Producciones

Fondo de Inversión

y Estímulos al

Cine (Fidecine)

Made with the

financial stimulus

of article 226 of

the LISR Eficine

Sabormax, Televisa,

Femsa, Casa B

Productions,

artemecánica,

Estudios

Churubusco, Arp

Selection, Film

Factory, BUF

Executive Producer

Adriana Bello

Cast

Tenoch Huerta

Lupe Esparanza,

'Teacher'

Dolores Heredia

Susana

Carlos Bardem

victim X

Kristyan Ferrer

Iguana/Doroteo

Eileen Yañez

Maxedonia, 'Maxi'

Mario Zaragoza

Melquiazdez

José Sefami

Commander José

Verónica Falcón

Madrina

Harold Torres

Pulga

Juan Carlos

Remolina

Arturo Lozano

Francisco Barreiro

Rulo

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1], [3:1]

and [1.85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Artificial Eye

Film Company

Mexican

theatrical title

Días de gracia

Mexico City, 2002. Policeman Lupe Esparza terrifies young Doroteo to discourage him from crime. Lupe's wife Esperanza gives birth to their son Emiliano. His partner Melquiazdez is wounded, and asks Lupe to deliver an important envelope. It contains photographs of a famous actor, who is later kidnapped. Melquiazdez tells Lupe not to get involved. Commander José promotes Lupe to his band of trusted anti-corruption 'Dorados'. He wants Madrina's restaurant shut down, because she's involved with kidnapping and drugs. Lupe forces Melquiazdez to reveal the envelope's source, and goes after black-marketeer Rulo. Esperanza and Emiliano are kidnapped and murdered. Lupe beats Melquiazdez to death and kidnaps Madrina, who tells him that he is being manipulated. Finding José now in charge of her restaurant, Lupe shoots him.

In 2006, a businessman is kidnapped. He works out that three people are possible: the teenage Doroteo, the more violent Pulga and the mysterious 'Teacher'. The businessman bonds with Doroteo over their shared interest in football. He reveals where to get the \$2 million ransom, but Pulga is killed collecting it. Teacher decides to kill the businessman, but Doroteo says he wants out. In the resulting standoff, both the businessman and Teacher are killed; the latter is revealed to be Lupe.

In 2010, businessman Arturo Lozano is kidnapped. While his wife Susana and their maid Maxi wait for news, Maxi worries whether her brother Doroteo might be involved. Susana confronts Arturo's business partner and orders him to pay the ransom. Arturo is freed, and rings home.

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Agnes Johansen
Baltasar Kormákur

Screenplay

Jón Atli Jónasson

Baltasar Kormákur

Director of

Photography

Bergsteinn

Björgúlfsson

Editors

Sverrir Kristjánsson

Elisabet Rónaldsdóttir

Production Designer

Atli Geir Grétarsson

Music

Ben Frost

Daniel Bjarnason

Sound Designers

Björn Viktorsson

Ingvar Lundberg

Costume Designer

Helga I. Stefánsdóttir

©[TBC]

Production

Companies

Blueeyes Productions

presents in

association

with Filmhuset

Produksjoner a film

by Baltasar Kormákur

Executive Producers

Lilja Pálmadóttir

David Linde

Cast

Ólafur Darri

Ólafsson

Gulli

Jóhann G.

Jóhannsson

Palli

Stefán Hallur

Stefánsson

Jón

Björn Thors

Hannes

Þröstur Leó

Gunnarsson

Lárus

Walter Geir

Grimsson

Raggi

Thorbjörg Helga

Thorgilsdóttir

Halla

Guojón Pedersen

Erlingur

Theodór Júlíusson

Gulli's father

Maria Sigurdardóttir

Gulli's mother

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Metrodome

Distribution Ltd

8,346 ft +0 frames

Icelandic

theatrical title

Djúpid

Iceland, 1984. Gulli, a young fisherman, hangs about and has a drink with friends, including the recently married Palli, before going out to sea on a fishing trip. At sea, small tensions arise between the crew members as they go about their business, until a sudden storm overpowers the creaking ship. The captain is killed immediately and the remaining crew attempt to swim for land, several miles away. Eventually, only chubby, baby-faced Gulli survives. As he swims, he talks to seagulls and prays to God; we see flashbacks to his childhood, when a volcanic eruption forced him to evacuate his home, and he imagines what he will do if he can survive one more day.

The island community hear of the disaster and assume that all the men are lost. After swimming for six hours, Gulli reaches land and walks for several more hours to reach civilisation. At first his return is greeted with disbelief, but medical tests support his story. His feat of survival attracts the attention of the media. Gulli attempts to come to terms with survivor's guilt and with his new status as something between a hero and a curiosity.

Despicable Me 2

USA 2013
Director: Chris Renaud, Pierre Coffin
Certificate U 98m 1s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Despicable Me, the surprise animated feature hit of 2010, revelled in its sheer cartoonishness. Outsize characters, slapstick gags and an elastic Looney Tunes-style visual humour enlivened its comic take on *Silas Marner*. Painted in the same broad strokes and exuberant bubblegum colours, this story-lite sequel has even less narrative drive, now that Gru is a devoted father rather than a scheming super-villain.

The obligatory good-humoured world-domination plot that must be foiled feels distinctly padded out by episodes of domestic cuteness and Gru's fruitless search for a girlfriend. Wacky interludes with his horde of yellow minions have also been upped, priming us for 2014's *Minions* movie. Nonetheless, directors Chris Renaud and Pierre Coffin have retained the visual wit and light-touch charm of the original.

Adults immune to the charms of pratfalls and 21-fartgun salutes can enjoy the lugubrious-versus-perky sparring of Steve Carell and Kristen Wiig's agile voice work as Gru and his new love Lucy. **B**



Crazy in love: 'Despicable Me 2'

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Chris Meledandri
Janet Healy
Written by
Cinco Paul
Ken Daurio
Editor
Gregory Perler
Production Designers
Yarrow Cheney
Eric Guillon
Score
Heitor Pereira
Sound Designer
Christopher Scarabosio
Animation Directors
Pierre Leduc
Bruno Dequier
©Universal Studios
Production

Company
Universal Pictures
presents a Chris Meledandri production
Voice Cast
Steve Carell
Gru
Kristen Wiig
Lucy Wilde
Benjamin Bratt
Eduardo Perez, 'El Macho'
Miranda Cosgrove
Margo
Russell Brand
Dr Nefario
Steve Coogan
Silas Ramsbottom
Ken Jeong
Floyd Eagle-san
Elsie Fisher

Agnes
Dana Gaier
Edith
Moises Arias
Antonio
Nasim Pedrad
Jillian
Kristen Schaal
Shannon

Dolby Digital/ Datasat/SDDS
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
Universal Pictures
International
UK & Eire

8,821 ft +8 frames

US, present day. Reformed villain Gru is recruited by the Anti-Villain League. He goes undercover in the Paradise Mall with Agent Lucy Wilde to find an evil mastermind who has stolen a transfiguring serum. His suspect Eduardo seems innocent, and Gru is sacked. Gru falls for Lucy. Eduardo, secretly the serum-snatcher El Macho, steals Gru's minions. He tries to enlist Gru and his sidekick Dr Nefario in his world-domination plans. Using the serum, El Macho and Dr Nefario turn the minions into a monster horde. El Macho kidnaps Lucy. Dr Nefario rejoins Gru, who attacks El Macho's HQ with the help of his three daughters, spraying the minions with Dr Nefario's antidote. They defeat El Macho but Lucy and Gru are stranded on a rocket being fired into a volcano. Gru asks Lucy on a date, and they jump to safety. Months later they marry, to his daughters' delight.

Eden

USA 2012
Director: Megan Griffiths

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

Corrupt federal marshal Bob Gault (Beau Bridges) chooses the alias 'Eden' for teenaged Hyun Jae (Jamie Chung), because the trailer park where she used to live with her parents in Las Cruces was called Eden's Garden, and also because, as he says, 'eden' comes from the Hebrew for 'delight' – a quality he hopes Hyun Jae will embody. Eden is also of course the Biblical locus of innocence lost – and sure enough the film that takes Hyun Jae's (false) name for its title will turn out to be, much like William Grefé's *The Devil's Sisters* (1966), Lukas Moodysson's *Lilya 4-Ever* (2002), Juanita Wilson's *As If I Am Not There* (2010) and Paul Hyett's *The Seasoning House* (2012), a harrowing tale of a young woman's abduction into sex slavery.

Unlike all those films, however, *Eden* addresses human trafficking within the United States: Hyun Jae, a naturalised American, never leaves the country's borders, but instead services porn shoots, frat parties, club orgies and suburban homes in dusty Nevada, all very much against her will and under constant threat of torture or worse. It is all drawn too closely for comfort from the real-life experiences of sex-trafficking survivor Chong Kim (as documented in the 2011 book *Not in My Town*), and comes as a compelling *j'accuse* to any westerners who imagine that their 'clean' home-grown sex industry is always predicated on consent.

To prevent her film about exploitation also becoming an exploitation film (like, say, Zack Snyder's *Sucker Punch*, also starring Chung), director/co-writer Megan Griffiths (*The Off Hours*) keeps the sex (and eventually violence) determinedly deglamorised and mostly off screen. Her focus instead is characterisation, in a film where even the villains of the piece – such as volatile 'stable' manager Vaughan (Matt O'Leary) – are humanised with elaborate histories and nuanced personalities.

From the start, identity is complicated here.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Colin Harper Plank
Jacob Mosler
Screenplay
Richard B. Phillips
Megan Griffiths
Story
Richard B. Phillips
Chong Kim
Based on the real-life story of Chong Kim
Cinematography
Sean Porter
Edited by
Eric Frith
Production Designer
Ben Blankenship
Music
Joshua Morrison
Jeremy Koepping
Matthew Emerson
Brown
Sound Mixer
Dave Richards
Costume Designer
Rebecca Luke
©Eden Productions
LLC
Production Companies
Centripetal Films
presents a Centripetal

Films production
Filmed with
funding assistance
from Washington
Filmworks

Cast
Jamie Chung
Hyun Jae, 'Eden'
Matt O'Leary
Vaughan
Beau Bridges
Bob Gault
Jeanine Monterrosa
Priscilla
Naama Kates
Svetlana
Eddie Martinez
Mario
Tantoo Cardinal
the nurse
Tracey Fairaway
Abbie
Scott Mechlowski
Jesse
Roman Roytberg
Ivan
John Farrage
Avni
Laura Kai Chen
Oma

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Clear Vision



Rules of engagement: Jamie Chung

Eighteen-year-old Hyun Jae gets into a bar using a fake ID, only to have her confidence won over by a kidnapper disguised as a fireman. If it is implied that Korean-born Hyun Jae is targeted because her abductors incorrectly assume that she is not a US citizen, she will soon change her all-American accent for faux-Chinese tones as part of her meretricious patter with the clients. As well as troubleshooting for the brothel, Gault is a respected lawman, husband and father. Vaughan is an ex-soldier with a Mennonite upbringing who deludes himself that he is improving the outlook for the women under his charge, even as he knows full well that his own life, like theirs, comes with a use-by date in this business. And innocent victim Hyun Jae will discover that her best chance of survival and perhaps escape is to become involved in the business end of the operation, even if that means having to live with the fatal consequences of her imposture. In leaving *Eden* behind, Hyun Jae is also unmasking the hidden face of our so-called civilised society. **S**

New Mexico, 1994. Eighteen-year-old Korean-born American Hyun Jae is picked up in a bar by a handsome fireman; she realises too late that his uniform is fake. Abducted and drugged, she wakes in a storage facility in the Nevada desert, where she and other young women are held captive and prostituted against their will. Bob Gault, a corrupt federal marshal, keeps the law at bay, while the younger, meth-addicted Vaughan manages the 'stable'. Renamed 'Eden', Hyun Jae quickly learns that trying to escape is futile and will result in harsh punishment.

A year later, after her pregnant younger friend Priscilla is taken away, Hyun Jae offers to help Vaughan with the daily running of the operation, and soon displaces the older Svetlana in his trust. After Gault and Vaughan dispose of some bodies (including Svetlana's), Vaughan murders Gault in front of Hyun Jae, reassuring her that the kill was ordered "from the top".

Vaughan takes Hyun Jae to the home of Mario, whom she recognises as one of her abductors. Seeing the heavily pregnant Priscilla – and a delivery room – Hyun Jae realises that Mario is selling babies. Caught with a wire, staff member Ivan is executed. As Vaughan prepares to move everyone out to Dubai, Hyun Jae poisons his meth pipe and kills him. After failing to buy Priscilla from Mario, she gives him a morphine overdose, rescues her friend and calls her mother.

Fire in the Night

United Kingdom 2013
Director: Anthony Wonke

Reviewed by Gilda Williams

Would you prefer to die by 1) being burnt alive by a 700°C fireball; 2) plunging 175 feet into the dark North Sea, where you will probably freeze and drown; 3) inhaling a toxic, boiling mix of oil fumes and gas; or 4) having red-hot metal scaffolding, falling from a collapsing 143,000-tonne oil-rig, crush you to pieces? Many of the survivors of the Piper Alpha oil-rig disaster interviewed in *Fire in the Night* faced that harrowing split-second decision: which imminent death seemed least painful? In recounting the terror, guilt and trauma of that night 25 years ago, when a routine maintenance operation sparked an explosion that escalated into a flaming two-hour deathtrap, witnesses are remarkably composed. They describe in detail the onboard confusion that delayed their evacuation, and how the fire grew so large and hot that rescue boats and helicopters could not attempt approach. A blueprint cross-section tracing the men's final desperate moves through the doomed rig – uncomfortably reminiscent of the moving-dot monster-tracker in *Alien* – effectively communicates how a random guess whether to head right or left down one of the rig's smoke-filled hallways spelt safety for a few, and an excruciating death for most.

From the copious archive material gathered here, it seems that the Piper Alpha – the first platform of its kind, steadily pumping out oil and gas from the bottom of the sea – was an accident-on-stilts waiting to happen. Pre-disaster footage shows brave rig-men ducking to narrowly avoid swinging hunks of machinery, or giant waves crashing over barely protected decks. At first, director Anthony Wonke seems oddly fascinated by the strange beauty of the disaster, opening with a stream of evocative archive stills that show the glowing heart of the burning rig against the blue-black sea and purple sky, or immense shape-shifting mountains of billowing smoke that look positively sublime. But his focus quickly shifts

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Anthony Wonke
Based on the book by
Stephen McGinty
Director of Photography
Mike Eley
Film Editor
Steve Ellis
Art Director
Tayyaba Irtizaali
Composer
Andrew Phillips
Sound Recordist
Luke Wheaton

@STV Productions Ltd and Berriff McGinty Films Ltd
Production Companies
STV Productions & Berriff McGinty Films
In association with Creative Scotland
STV Productions & Berriff McGinty Films for BBC Scotland
Executive Producers
Alan Clements
Michael McAvoy

In Colour
[1.78:1]
Distributor
Soda Pictures

A documentary about the worst ever offshore oil-rig accident, the Piper Alpha disaster off the coast of Scotland, where on 6 July 1988 a single gas explosion grew into a vast fire that took the lives of 167 men and left just 61 survivors. Archive footage, reconstructions and testimonies (conducted primarily with rig-workers and a couple of rescuers) document the two hours aboard the burning rig and its aftermath. A post-accident inquiry resulted in 106 recommendations, all taken on by the oil industry, which have improved rig-safety records ever since.




Horror at sea: 'Fire in the Night'

to the survivors themselves and their blow-by-blow accounts of the inferno they somehow escaped while their colleagues perished.

The occasional arty touch – a brief operatic soundtrack, slightly overacted reconstructions, the hallucinatory image of a watery bride as a survivor explains that a promise to his daughter to provide her dream wedding pushed him to survive – can jar with the mostly down-to-earth interviews. But Wonke is a generous interviewer, giving each man the time to tell his tale, and he mostly avoids upstaging their words with filmcraft.

A quick internet search reveals how much dirt Wonke chose not to dig up, such as the fatal design flaw whereby all the rescue boats were concentrated in a single area virtually inaccessible to the men because of the fire's location. Although the uneasy trade-off between safety and profit is briefly introduced, and our inevitable conclusion is that the 226 men on board served as boiler-suited canaries testing the gas-laced corridors of the North Sea oil trade, Wonke decided not to produce a grim tale of capitalist realism but to offer instead a dignified commemoration to the crew. The disaster's after-effects were also devastating, as traumatised survivors – many severely burned – struggled to return to normality. One particularly miraculous survivor, who came out alive despite not knowing even how to swim, admits that he turned to heavy drinking in the wake of the wreck, and was only redeemed when chosen to be sculpted as the central figure in a monument commemorating the accident, now standing in an Aberdeen city park.

That artwork seems to parallel the aims of Wonke's film: to heal and memorialise, not reopen old wounds. In the final scenes, Wonke films the interviewees as they watch on an iPad the same pre-wreck footage that we've just witnessed, often showing smiling workers making the best of a tough job. Expressions of relief, nostalgia and even happiness momentarily cut across the survivors' faces as they remember lost friends. Wonke has attempted here mostly to offer the heroic survivors some solace and to pay tribute to the victims, and in this he abundantly triumphs. 

Frances Ha

Director: Noah Baumbach

See feature on page 22


Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

Frances Ha, like Frances herself, is genial, charming and only occasionally prone to outbursts that might discomfit the viewer. While its New

York locations, hipster milieu and sex comedy suggest vintage Woody Allen-ish ambitions, its lack of grounding in the present moment (aside from ubiquitous iPhones) leaves it feeling inconsequential. Its lightness – both levity in the writing and a deft performance style – is a virtue given its focus on a dancer and choreographer, but also an irritant as Frances floats through New York. "I'm poor," Frances notes when she is let go from the company she dances for. "That's an insult to actual poor people," her roommate Benji replies; the film then drops the subject of economic precarity. Frances's search for housing and work is soft-focused by the film's innate geniality: this is no *Wendy and Lucy* (2008).

Nor does it have to be, but irritation with the film arises from inevitable comparisons, many of which are present as self-aware references. Allen, Whit Stillman, Hal Hartley, Nicole Holofcener: there's a genealogy of smart-yet-melancholy American indie cinema in which *Frances Ha* is positioning itself, and whose incisiveness it doesn't share. "Lena, I mean Leda," stutters a character at a dinner party, about an absent acquaintance: Lena Dunham is Banquo's ghost at this feast. Co-writers Greta Gerwig (who stars as Frances) and Noah Baumbach (who also directs) are as ready with the frank girl talk but less brazen. They are more concerned with the central, and unresolvable, issue of *Girls* (also crucial to Judd Apatow's work): the shift from a rich homosocial lifestyle, associated with artistic freedom and hedonism, to unsatisfactory, exclusory heterosexual pair bonding, associated with loss and compromise.

Frances's relationship with her best friend Sophie, including her return to work at Vassar College where they met, is the heart of the film, narratively taking the place of the expected straight romance/break-up. When Sophie moves out of their shared apartment, Frances enters a nomadic period that evokes another contemporary New York-set work concerned with sex, lies, new technology and uncomfortable roommates: Steve McQueen's *Shame* (2011). Stylistically, the films are worlds apart, not least because *Frances Ha* is shot in black-and-white. This aesthetic works fitfully: the interiors feel like digital colour images that have been greyscaled, but the exteriors are crisp. In fact it's an exterior dance sequence that is both evocative of *Shame* and – perhaps because of the intertext – the most sublime moment in the film. Many reviewers noted the transfixing long take in McQueen's film of its protagonist Brandon's night-time jog. Frances, instead, runs, skips, leaps and fouettés irresistibly through Chinatown in daylight as a similar tracking shot keeps pace with her.

She's running towards her new apartment, rooming with sculptor Lev and wannabe screenwriter Benji (in an in-joke, Benji is writing spec scripts for *Saturday Night Live*, one of Baumbach's prior credits), who call the women they sleep with "sluts" 




Dissent of a woman: Greta Gerwig, Mickey Sumner

– versions of Brandon in a minor key. That Frances is so full of *joie de vivre* is in pointed contrast to McQueen's downbeat film. That her run is soundtrack by David Bowie's 'Modern Love' (which reappears over the end credits) suggests that the film is acknowledging its relation to contemporary statements on modern love such as *Shame* and *Girls*, while harking back to a less confrontational era.

Comfortably confident storytelling is a hallmark of Baumbach's films, and there's nothing disruptive or inventive here in filmmaking terms, bar the lack of colour – and the incorporation of dance. Frances's development as a character away from her dyad with Sophie is linked with dance practice, and the film's light-hearted resolution is an idealised climax where all Frances's friends attend a dance programme in which she has choreographed a piece about how meetings between paired individuals become an ensemble. Sweetly obvious as it is, the dance is filmed impeccably in wide shot, with a real sense of the movement from rehearsal to realised work.

The serious commitment to filming dance

may show the influence of its new popularity in American mainstream culture but could also be linked to another indie darling, Miranda July, whose most recent film *The Future* similarly focused on an apprentice dancer worrying about commitment. July's more experimental, innovative and less together film was frustrating in its own ways, but the future that Gerwig and Baumbach propose for Frances seems all too easily achieved and normative, both psychologically and cinematically, compared to the sublime stalemate of July's characters.

Frances Ha gets its title from the very end of the film, when Frances writes out her name for her mailbox but has to fold it so that her surname (which appears to be Halflady) is curtailed. It's a neat joke about someone reinventing themselves, taking life lightly, and only halfway there. The ruefulness of that 'Ha' suggests that Baumbach's audience and ambition remain attuned to *SNL* and *The New Yorker*, to which he is a contributor; the thoughtfulness and commitment of Gerwig's performance in its shifts from chaotic exuberance to rigorous rehearsal suggest that she is the more interesting artist to watch. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Noah Baumbach
Scott Rudin
Lila Yacoub
Rodrigo Teixeira
Written by
Noah Baumbach
Greta Gerwig
Director of Photography
Sam Levy
Editor
Jennifer Larme
Production Designer
Sam Lisenco
Re-Recording Mixer
Paul Hsu

©[TBC]
Production Companies
RT Features present
a Pine District

Pictures/Scott Rudin production
Executive Producers
Fernando Loureiro
Lourenço Sant'anna

Cast
Greta Gerwig
Frances
Mickey Sumner
Sophie
Adam Driver
Lev
Michael Zegen
Benji
Patrick Heusinger
Patch
Charlotte d'Amboise
Colleen
Grace Gummer
Rachel

Dolby Digital
In Black and White
[L85:1]

Distributor
Metrodome
Distribution Ltd

New York, the present. Frances, an aspiring dancer and choreographer, lives in Brooklyn with her best friend from college, Sophie. Having turned down her boyfriend's invitation to move in with him because of her shared lease with Sophie, she has to leave the apartment when Sophie moves to Tribeca. Initially she rooms with Benji and Lev, two wealthy wannabe artists, in Chinatown, but when choreographer Colleen lets her go from the company she dances for, she falls out with Sophie, returns to her parents in Sacramento for Christmas and then sofa-surfs with Rachel, another dancer. Turning down Colleen's offer of an office job with the company, Frances works as a summer-school counsellor and waitress at her old college, Vassar. Sophie, meanwhile, is engaged and living in Tokyo.

After she and Sophie are briefly reunited, Frances takes Colleen's job offer and moves into her own apartment. All her friends come to see a dance that she has choreographed.

From Up on Poppy Hill

Japan 2011
Director: Goro Miyazaki
Certificate U 91m 41s

Reviewed by Andrew Osmond

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

Imagine if Disney had animated not just fairytales and animal adventures but also non-fantasies such as *The Parent Trap* (which Disney made twice in live action, in 1961 and 1998). Japan's Studio Ghibli, best known for *Spirited Away* (2001), does something similar in the period teen drama *From Up on Poppy Hill*, set in the port town of Yokohama in 1963. Here, as in *The Parent Trap*, the young protagonists are amazed to learn that they are, or may be, long-lost siblings. In *Parent Trap*, the discovery meant getting the best friend imaginable; in *Poppy Hill*, it's the source of romantic anguish – for the characters are a boy and girl who've fallen in love.

Poppy Hill is a low-key film with low-key leads, eschewing sensation or melodrama. Any cartoon film that hints at incest will draw startled reactions in Britain, but the *Poppy Hill* characters never even kiss. (In Japan, stories of forbidden love are a staple of both comics and cartoons.) The movie's charm comes from its support characters, who are portrayed with gentle humour, and from the way that Ghibli's ethos imbues the modest story. The actions and backgrounds may be 'mundane', yet their presence is heightened just by being drawn. Characters move purposefully through Yokohama's *mise en scène*, which bustles with buses and boats. One of Ghibli's special motifs is food – and here its preparation is a major duty for the girl character, Umi, uniting her family and friends and bringing back memories of her parents.

Poppy Hill also revolves around a huge dilapidated clubhouse, much like the magic bathhouse in *Spirited Away*. The building's cobwebbed, cluttered tiers are full of implied history and strange denizens (Umi finds a nest of introverted schoolboys). Both Umi and the boy she likes, Shun, fight to save the clubhouse from demolition. At the same time they're frustrated by their unclear family history, making them unsure whether or not they are indeed brother and sister. The implicit link between the strands is the importance of regaining the past, also a key theme in *Spirited Away*.

Umi and Shun are among Ghibli's least memorable protagonists, yet as vehicles for *Poppy Hill*'s ethos they convey propriety and self-respect, even when faced with an unspeakable taboo. They never defy authority, but the film's script encourages youngsters to find their own answers. We learn that Umi's own parents eloped, and the last scenes challenge the schoolkids to rise to the level of adults. At the same time it's the portrait of teenage society that is most buoyant on screen: the boys' exaggerated brawls are rowdy and merry – and then the same boys are alarmed by girls sweeping enthusiastically into their geeky clubhouse domain wielding mops and brooms.

With a jaunty score and period songs, *Poppy Hill* is the second film by Hayao Miyazaki's son Goro. He is clearly more comfortable with small dramas than he was with the otherworld fantasy of *Tales from Earthsea* (2006). Hayao himself has a credit on the screenplay, which is based on a 1980 girls' comic. Notably, the senior Miyazaki's next animated film will also be a non-fantasy period drama, called *The*

The Frozen Ground

USA 2011
Director: Scott Walker
Certificate 15 105m 15s

Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

Based on the case of 1980s Alaskan serial killer Robert Hansen, *The Frozen Ground* is quick to establish a mood of earnest solemnity. A pre-credits quotation from the Book of Isaiah (“as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth”) laments the dead, yet the film opens not with a killing but with a survival. Hansen’s young female victims numbered 17, but first-time writer-director Scott Walker’s dramatisation focuses on Cindy Paulson, a teenage prostitute who eluded Hansen’s clutches and was instrumental in his eventual conviction. In an urgent opening scene, police find Cindy handcuffed, bloodied and hysterical in a motel room, but her claims that Hansen raped and nearly killed her are all but laughed off by boorish detectives mindful of the suspect’s upstanding reputation. Walker’s recurring theme throughout is the plight of the voiceless – the ‘silent sheep’ – on the lower rungs of society, amply illustrated by Cindy’s humiliation.

This would be a fairly rote, if efficient, true-crime procedural if it weren’t for the slightly *Klute*-like dynamic between the wary, disillusioned Cindy (Vanessa Hudgens) and Jack Halcombe (Nicolas Cage), the investigating state trooper who makes himself her dogged protector and ally. Trawling through Anchorage’s seamy red-light district, Halcombe determines to shelter his only witness, as all the while Hansen eyes an opportunity to finish what he started. A composite of several real-life officers, Halcombe is, wouldn’t you know it, two weeks away from a transfer when he’s fatefully snared by the case, and his red-tape-battling lone crusader rings familiar bells. He is even given credit here for the influential psychological profile for Hansen, which in reality was supplied by the FBI.

Fresh from knowingly tearing up her wholesome image in *Spring Breakers*, Hudgens has a considerably meatier role here, and makes a decent fist of Cindy’s conflicting guile and vulnerability. Cage has less to work with; despite intervals where he bonds with Cindy over mutual family tragedy, Halcombe is essentially a white knight without much nuance. As his nemesis Hansen, John Cusack is effectively understated, his familiar garrulousness replaced by halting stammers.

Walker’s background is in advertising, which might explain the movie’s unsubtle signifiers and symbolism. The remote cabin where Hansen holds his victims captive is festooned with animal heads – admittedly probably close to how it actually appeared. But Walker gets carried away, with animals displayed on TV whenever anyone happens to be watching (for the hunted Cindy, it’s *Tom and Jerry*; for Hansen, a nature show depicting a predatory crocodile chomping a gazelle). Other problems arise: Cindy’s narrative almost breaks away as a separate, dubiously titillating hard-knocks melodrama in itself, as she takes up stripping, succumbs to crystal meth, identifies a surrogate mother in a fellow hooker and remonstrates back and forth with her grasping pimp (played by 50 Cent). There’s also an uneven quality to the visuals; split between nervy handheld work and dramatic vistas showcasing the wild Knik River landscape, the film struggles to forge a consistent formal vision.

These missteps – and the script’s occasional resort to dramatic clichés at big moments – leave *The Frozen Ground* less compelling than it might have been, a competent albeit rarely distinctive debut. **S**

Wind Rises, about aircraft designer Horikoshi Jiro. It opens in Japan this summer.

This review is based on the subtitled *Poppy Hill*. Most UK cinemas will screen the American dub, not previewed at press time, which features the voices of Sarah Bolger and Anton Yelchin. Reviews from America indicate that the dub makes some changes to the Japanese script, with an added voiceover as the film starts. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Suzuki Toshio
Screenplay
Hayao Miyazaki
Niwa Keiko
Based on the original graphic novel by Takahashi Chizuru, Sayama Tetsuro
Director of Digital Imaging
Okui Atsushi
Original Music
Takebe Satoshi
Sound Design
Kasamatsu Koji
Animation Directors
Yamashita Akihiko
Yamagata Atsushi
Kousaka Kitaro

©Takahashi Chizuru, Sayama Tetsuro, GNDHDT

Production Companies

Studio Ghibli, Nippon Television Network, Dentsu, Hakuhodo DYMP, Walt Disney Japan, Mitsubishi and Toho presents A Studio Ghibli production

Executive Producer

Hoshino Koji

English Language Version

Director

Gary Rydstrom

Producer

Geoffrey Wexler

Screenplay

Karey Kirkpatrick

Patrick Mullen

Supervising Sound Editor

Gwendolyn Yates Whittle

Executive Producers

Frank Marshall

Kathleen Kennedy

Voice Cast

Japanese Language Version

Nagasawa Masami

Matsuzaki Umi

Okada Junichi

Kazama Shun

Takeshita Keiko

Matsuzaki Hana

Ishida Yuriko

Hokuto Miki

Hiragi Rumi

Hirokoji Sachiko

Fubuki Jun

Matsuzaki Ryoko

Naito Takashi

Onodera Yoshio

Kazama Shunsuke

Mizunuma Shiro

Omori Nao

Kazama Akio

Kagawa Teruyuki

Chairman Tokumaru

Shiraishi Haruka

Matsuzaki Sora

Kobayashi Tsubasa

Matsuzaki Riku

English Language Version

Sarah Bolger

Matsuzaki Umi

Anton Yelchin

Kazama Shun

Gillian Anderson

Matsuzaki Hana

Christina Hendricks

Hokuto Miki

Aubrey Plaza

Hirokoji Sachiko

Jamie Lee Curtis

Matsuzaki Ryoko

Bruce Dern

Onodera Yoshio

Charlie Saxton

Mizunuma Shiro

Chris Noth

Kazama Akio

Beau Bridges

Chairman Tokumaru

Isabelle Fuhrman

Matsuzaki Sora

Alex Wolff

Matsuzaki Riku

Ron Howard

philosophy club

president

Dolby Digital/ Datasat

In Colour

[L85:1]

Released in

subtitled and

dubbed versions

Distributor

Studiocanal Limited

8,251 ft +8 frames

Japanese

theatrical title

Kokurikozaka kara

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Mark Ordesky
Jane Fleming
Randall Emmett
Curtis Jackson
Remington Chase
Jeff Rice

Written by

Scott Walker

Director of Photography

Patrick Murguia

Editor

Sarah Boyd

Production Designer

Clark Hunter

Music

Lorne Balfe

Sound Mixer

Richard Schexnayder

Costume Designer

Lynn Falconer

©Georgia Film

Fund Five, LLC

Production Companies

Emmett/Furla

Films and Voltage

Pictures presents

a Cheetah Vision

Films production

In association with

Emmett/Furla

Films and

Court Five, Envision

Entertainment and

K5 International

A film by Scott Walker

Executive Producers

George Furla

Stepan Martirosyan

Kevin Frakes

Martin Richard

Blencowe

Mark Stewart

Brandt Andersen

Brett Granstaff

Corey Large

Ted Fox

Elisa Salinas

Daniel Wagner

Fredrik Malmberg

Olga Valentina

Barry Brooker

Stan Wertlieb

Cast

Nicolas Cage

Sergeant Jack

Halcombe

John Cusack

Robert Hansen

Vanessa Hudgens

Cindy Paulsen

Dean Norris

Sergeant Lyle

Haugsvén

Kevin Dunn

Lieutenant Bob Jent

Olga Valentina

Jodi Brandon

Michael McGrady

Vice Det. John Gentile

Jodi Lyn O'Keefe

Chelle Ringell

Kurt Fuller

D.A. Pat Clives

Brad William Henke

Carl Galenski

Katherine LaNasa

Fran Hansen

Ryan O'Nan

Officer Greg Baker

Matt Gerald

Ed Stauber

Radha Mitchell

Allie Halcombe

Curtis '50 Cent'

Jackson

Clate Johnson

Dolby Digital/ Datasat

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Koch Film

9,472 ft +8 frames

Yokohama, Japan, 1963. Schoolgirl Umi lives at a boarding house on a hill, raising flags for the ships below in memory of her father, who died in the Korean War. At school she encounters Shun, a boy involved in a campaign to save the school's venerable clubhouse. The two become close, helping to renovate the clubhouse. However, Shun is shocked to see a photograph of Umi's father, who he thinks is also his own biological father – making Umi his half-sister.

Shun and Umi wrestle with their feelings but continue to work together at the clubhouse. When its demolition seems inevitable, they travel to Tokyo and ask the school chairman to see it. He does so, and declares that the building will be saved. Finally Shun and Umi meet a ship's captain who knew both their fathers. Shun is in fact the son of Umi's father's friend, meaning that there is no bar to the youngsters' love.

Alaska, 1983. Anchorage police find Cindy Paulson, a 17-year-old prostitute, handcuffed in a motel room. Cindy insists that a local man, Robert Hansen, raped and tried to kill her, but her claims are dismissed when Hansen produces an alibi. State trooper Jack Halcombe learns of Cindy's story when the remains of several young women are discovered around the rural Knik River area. After meeting Cindy, Halcombe reopens the case but faces resistance from the district attorney due to lack of evidence. Hansen continues to kill, flying his victims to a remote cabin before 'hunting' them in the wilderness. Aware that Hansen has resumed stalking her, Cindy attempts to flee the

state but Halcombe persuades her to stay and testify. Realising that he is once more a suspect, Hansen hires a hitman, Galenski, to get rid of Cindy. Halcombe finds incriminating evidence at Hansen's cabin but Cindy, afraid that she won't be believed, decides to leave town with her pimp Clate instead of testifying. Clate betrays Cindy, delivering her to Galenski, who then kills Clate. Cindy escapes and hides out in a brothel, where she is rescued by Halcombe. Hansen is arrested but maintains his innocence. However, when Halcombe has Cindy enter the room, Hansen gives himself away. He ultimately confesses to the murder of 17 women and the kidnapping and rape of another 30.

Girl Most Likely

USA 2012

Directors: Shari Springer Berman, Robert Pulcini
Certificate 12A 103m 1s

Reviewed by Anna Smith

There's nothing new in the idea of a city chick finding solace in her suburban home after a reluctant trip down memory lane. This chick, however, is literally dragged kicking and screaming: after a fake suicide attempt, Imogene (Kristen Wiig) is sent home from hospital with her gambling mother Zelda (Annette Bening) and reacts wildly, requiring sedation. Later, she wakes alone, still in her hospital gown, in the back of a car in a casino car park.

It's a promisingly dark sketch of her family life, compounded by the discovery that her mother has rented out her bedroom to a lodger and is dating a man (Matt Dillon) who purports to be a CIA agent and time-traveller. Imogene's return to the (uncomfortable) womb is symbolised by the sheet-tent her brother hastily erects for her in the living room. From there, she is disturbed to hear her mother being spanked by her new boyfriend. Imogene's family retreat is not as she left it and she must come to terms with the changes in order to grow up – or indeed be reborn. Having sex with the lodger in her former bedroom is a rather literal attempt to regain old ground, but it may be what she needs to move on.

Tonally, *Girl Most Likely* lacks confidence almost as much as its heroine. Under the direction of Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini (*The Nanny Diaries*), the promise of the dysfunctional characters periodically falls through the cracks in a slow-paced narrative. The relationship with lodger Lee feels too cosy and predictable, while eccentric brother Ralph's comic tone begins as quirky but settles into broad as he stumbles around New York wearing his invention, a giant mollusc shell for humans.

Performances range from solid to strong. Wiig has retained, if not built on, the likeable kookiness that helped to make 2011's *Bridesmaids* a success, while Bening is terrific as her scatty,



Curtains: Kristen Wiig, Darren Criss

well-meaning, self-centred mother. Screenplay writer Michelle Morgan is effective as Imogene's bitchy friend Georgina, who suffers her less privileged pal with a supercilious smile. This relationship touches on interesting issues, such as the tendency to cling on to ailing, mismatched friendships and the danger of outward politeness barely masking brimming intolerance. Morgan has an insight into female friendships and family relationships and a fitfully witty turn of phrase. But her script fails to explore the issues it raises – including the mental health of her protagonist, who is admitted to a psych ward at the beginning of the film. The notion that a delve into one's past has curative properties is credible but it's communicated in a relatively simplistic fashion.

Girl Most Likely attempts darker material than your average comedy, but these themes beg for a more dramatic treatment. There are giggles – just not quite enough to help you laugh this off. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Celine Rattray
Trudie Styler
Alix Madigan
Mark Amin
Written by
Michelle Morgan
Director of Photography
Steve Yedlin
Edited by
Robert Pulcini
Production Designer
Annie Spitz
Music
Rob Simonsen
Production Sound Mixers
Stuart Deutsch
Jeff Pullman
Costume Designer
Tom Broecker

and Gambit Films
A film by Robert Pulcini and Shari Springer Berman
Filmed with the support of the New York State Governor's Office for Motion Picture and Television Development
Executive Producers
Kristen Wiig
Michelle Morgan
Miranda Bailey
Matt Leutwyler
Steve Golin
Dylan K. Narang
Nadine de Barros
Pamela Hirsch
Olivier Morali

Cast

Kristen Wiig
Imogene Duncan
Annette Bening
Zelda
Matt Dillon
George
Darren Criss
Lee
Christopher Fitzgerald
Ralph
June Diane Raphael

Dara
Natasha Lyonne
Allyson
Bob Balaban
Maxwell
Michelle Morgan
Georgina
Brian Petsos
Peter

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

9,271 ft +8 frames

New York, the present. Failed playwright Imogene is dumped by her boyfriend Peter and fired by her boss. To get Peter's attention, she fakes a suicide attempt and is admitted first to a mental hospital and then into the reluctant care of her mother Zelda, a gambling addict.

At the family home in Ocean City, New Jersey, Imogene's room has been rented out to a singer, Lee. Her brother Ralph, who appears to have learning difficulties, is obsessed with clams. Zelda is dating George, a professed CIA agent who accidentally reveals that the father Imogene thought was dead is still alive. Imogene returns to New York to discover that she has been evicted from her apartment. Back in Ocean City, she tries to help Ralph woo local girl Allyson, and attends Lee's concert. Later, Imogene and Lee sleep together. Lee, Imogene and Ralph go to New York. Imogene attends a book launch and is ridiculed by her friends and her ex; Ralph is cautioned by police after trying out his new invention, a giant synthetic mollusc shell. Imogene and Ralph meet their father, who acts coldly and offers Imogene money. Returning to Ocean City, Imogene retreats to the basement while an assassin surprises George (who apparently really is a CIA operative) and holds him, Zelda and Ralph hostage. Using the giant shell, Imogene knocks the assassin out and Ralph gains fame for his invention.

Imogene's autobiographical play is a hit on the New York stage. Her family, Lee and Allyson come to see the play.

The Heat

USA/United Kingdom/Australia 2013

Director: Paul Feig
Certificate 15 116m 56s

Reviewed by Anna Smith

"Oh look, Velma and Daphne got captured!" taunts a male police officer to FBI agent Sarah Ashburn (Sandra Bullock) and cop Shannon Mullins (Melissa McCarthy), as they're tied up during a raid. The *Scooby-Doo* reference is not accidental: *The Heat*'s cursory plot revolves around disguise, cartoon baddies and fleeting peril.

Far more interesting is the tone of this statement: the sexism that undermines Ashburn and Mullins wherever they go. These two women are both reviled and feared by colleagues for taking on perceived masculine characteristics (the aggressive Mullins even refers to her "balls"). As the story progresses, they find strength from each other.

But this isn't *Thelma & Louise*. It's a buddy comedy that flirts with broad and bawdy along with character humour. Bullock mostly plays the straight woman while McCarthy – reuniting with *Bridesmaids* director Paul Feig – is consistently the funniest element of the film, whether dripping with sarcasm or hinting at unexpected warmth. *The Heat* may not be *Bridesmaids*, but it's good to see a buddy-cop comedy trying the female angle, even if only with mixed success. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Peter Chernin
Jenno Topping
Written by
Katie Dippold
Director of Photography
Robert Yeoman
Film Editors
Brent White
Jay Deuby
Production Designer
Jefferson Sage
Music
Mike Andrews
Production Sound Mixer
Ken McLaughlin
Costume Designer
Catherine Marie Thomas

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Corporation and TSG Entertainment Finance LLC (in Brazil, Italy, Japan, Korea and Spain)
Production Companies
Twentieth Century Fox presents a Chernin Entertainment production Made in association with TSG Entertainment and Ingenious Media
Produced in association with Big Screen Productions and Ingenious Film Partners
Executive Producers
Paul Feig
Michele Imperato
Stabile
Dylan Clark
Film Extracts
Nightmare Alley (1947)
Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter? (1957)

Cast
Sandra Bullock

Sarah Ashburn
Melissa McCarthy
Shannon Mullins
Demian Bichir
Hale
Marlon Wayans
Levy
Michael Rapaport
Jason Mullins
Jane Curtin
Mrs Mullins
Spoken Reasons
Rojas
Dan Bakkedahl
Craig
Taran Killam
Adam
Michael McDonald
Julian
Tom Wilson
Captain Woods

Dolby Digital/ Datasat/SDDS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
20th Century Fox International (UK)

10,524 ft +0 frames

New York, the present. Methodical, unpopular FBI agent Sarah Ashburn is sent to Boston to investigate drug kingpin Larkin. She reluctantly teams up with an equally unpopular local police officer, the aggressive, instinctive Shannon Mullins. While trailing a local dealer, they come under fire from two DEA agents who blame them for blowing their cover. Mullins's brother Jason, recently released from prison, is asked to work for Larkin but refuses. The Mullins family are threatened; they flee but Jason is shot. During a raid, Mullins and Ashburn are held captive by dealers and discover that one of the DEA agents is Larkin. Escaping, they prevent Larkin killing Jason in hospital; Ashburn shoots and wounds Larkin. Ashburn and Mullins are congratulated on uncovering corruption; Ashburn moves to Boston.

The Internship

USA 2013
Director: Shawn Levy
Certificate 12A 119m 15s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

The most chilling piece of dystopian science fiction to reach screens in some time is a comedy called *The Internship*. This is not by design. In fact it's fairly certain that *The Internship*, in which two middle-aged out-of-work salesmen compete with people half their age for a job at Google, was intended to be a hopeful movie, since it proves that old dogs – reunited *Wedding Crashers* co-stars Vince Vaughn and Owen Wilson as Billy and Nick – can learn new tricks, and that no manchild need be left behind in this brave new economic world.

There is something to be said for a film that is nostalgic for salesmanship, because the salesman's profession has long been made a symbol of Everything Wrong With America, from Willy Loman onwards. But *The Internship* isn't just about the fate of face-to-face salesmanship in a post-human world – it is a piece of salesmanship in itself, the apotheosis of your-ad-here billboard Hollywood, a feature-length product-placement for Google which takes for granted that getting the opportunity to be a cog in the rainbow-coloured works of their Googleplex headquarters is the highest attainment in the contemporary world. ("It's ranked as the greatest place to work in America!" enthuses Billy.)

The screenplay, by Vaughn and Jared Stern, breaks from straight shilling for the tech sector to give lip service to uncontroversial life lessons familiar from recent mainstream American comedies, reminding us to look up from our screens and just *be here, now*. (This was also the moral of Adam Sandler's far more aggrieved and potent *Click*, which itself featured a shameless plug for retail chain Bed, Bath & Beyond.) Billy and Nick are two analogue relics trained in the seemingly outdated art of backslapping interpersonal business, but they bring their

fellow interns – youths variously deformed by internet reliance – out of their shells. One of these interns is a self-flagellating Asian-American introvert who uses programming to escape his domineering Tiger Mother; another is a bitter phone-fixated killjoy; the lone female is an IRL virgin with an online fantasy life that would make Larry Flynt blush. Even the team's ostensible manager, ill-socialised Lyle (Josh Brener), can only talk in an unintelligible lingo of netspeak and hip-hop patois. Billy and Nick are of another vintage – the pair are introduced getting pumped for a sale by listening to Alanis Morissette's 'Ironic', and Billy repeatedly references *Flashdance* in his locker-room pep-talks. (The *Star Wars* jokes, of course, are common ground.)

Little in the journey from generation gap to generation synthesis is funny exactly, nor is the film's optimistically viewed present-tense future particularly inviting, for it's hideously lit by DP Jonathan Brown (*The Big Wedding*, *Just Married*), who blasts everything with his trademark bright, flat sitcom wash. The castaway viewer can, though, find fleeting pleasures to cling to during *The Internship*'s two hours: Will Ferrell passes through wearing a Sanskrit neck tattoo and doing a variation of the petty-potentate local businessman that he perfected on *Eastbound & Down*. Playing opposite Rose Byrne, Wilson shows reliable ease with a light romantic subplot, and the pair are simpatico on their date duet, noteworthy for being one of few scenes in the movie that relies on character for punchlines instead of cross-promotional pop-culture reference. But mostly *The Internship* presents a world of smotheringly limited horizons where lowest-common-denominator pop trash is the only badge of generational solidarity, and sells it as the best there is. 🍿

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Vince Vaughn
Shawn Levy
Screenplay
Vince Vaughn
Jared Stern
Story
Vince Vaughn
Director of Photography
Jonathan Brown
Film Editor
Dean Zimmerman
Production Designer
Tom Meyer
Music
Christophe Beck
Sound Mixer
Steve Cantamessa
Costume Designer
Leesa Evans

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Company, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, Monarchy Enterprises S.a.r.l. and TSG Entertainment Finance LLC (in Brazil, Italy, Korea, Japan and Spain)
Production Companies
Twentieth Century Fox and Regency Enterprises present a Wild West Picture Show/21 Laps production
A Shawn Levy film
Made in association with TSG Entertainment

Executive Producers

Arnon Milchan
Dan Levine
Josh McLaglen
Mary McLaglen
Sandra J. Smith
Scott Stuber
Film Extracts
X-Men (2000)

Cast

Vince Vaughn
Billy McMahon
Owen Wilson
Nick Campbell
Rose Byrne
Dana Sims
Max Minghella
Graham Hawtrey
Aasif Mandvi
Mr Chetty

Josh Brener

Lyle Spaulding
Dylan O'Brien
Stuart
Tobit Raphael
Yo-Yo Santos
Tiya Sircar
Neha Patel
Jessica Szohr
Marielena Gutierrez
Josh Gad
Mr Anderson,
'Headphones'
Rob Riggle
Randy

[uncredited]
Will Ferrell
Kevin, mattress salesman

Dolby Digital/ Datasat In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor
20th Century Fox International (UK)

10,732 ft +8 frames

The US, the present. Billy and Nick, two middle-aged salesmen, discover that the company that's long employed them has folded. Faced with their impending obsolescence, Billy decides to sign Nick and himself up for the summer internship programme at Google in the San Francisco Bay Area, where their fellow interns will be on average half their age.

The programme requires the interns to divide into teams, with only the winning team earning full-time employment. Billy and Nick's team is led by 23-year-old manager Lyle. Technologically illiterate,

Billy and Nick are resented by their teammates after they cause the team to fail the first set of challenges. In time, however, the people skills that once made Billy and Nick successful salesmen help them to befriend their teammates, who learn to loosen up and live a little under the older men's tutelage. Meanwhile Nick, inspired by a crush on Google exec Dana, starts reading books and studying. However, Billy inadvertently costs the team their penultimate test, and walks away in shame. At the last moment, Nick manages to lure him back for the final Google challenge: sales. Billy and Nick's team win.

Les Invisibles

France 2012
Director: Sébastien Lifshitz

Reviewed by Ben Walters

Ageing and, more generally, the effects wrought on character by the passage of time and the weight of the past are abiding concerns of Sébastien Lifshitz. *Presque rien*, his 2000 feature debut, was about a passionate late-adolescent affair by the sea in which any notions of fantasy idylls were dispatched not only by the story's emotionally complex and upsetting turns but also by the framing device that explicitly located the affair in the recent past of one of its traumatised participants. In 2004's *Wild Side*, a trans sex worker living in Paris is obliged to return to the countryside to care for her mother, provoking reconsideration of both her childhood and the formative period of her life in the capital. *Going South* (2009) was ostensibly an edifice of polymorphous adolescent sexuality, but hiding in the cellar of the tale was anxiety about the potential rediscovery of a long-absent parent – a situation also crucial to Lifshitz's 1999 TV movie *Les terres froides* and his 2001 documentary *The Crossing*.

In his two recent documentary features, Lifshitz has for the first time concentrated not just on the passage of time but on being old. In *Bambi*, the titular 77-year-old trans cabaret star turned literature professor tells her incredible life story to the camera. For the most part, the subjects of *Les Invisibles* have, as the title suggests, led lives further from the spotlight, yet their stories are no less valuable or engaging for that. Each of them is over 70 and the documentary's title refers as much to the cultural underrepresentation of older LGBT people as to any clandestine or nondescript quality that could be taken as characterising the lives themselves. On the contrary, these figures have all, in different ways, stuck their necks out. As mischievously bright-eyed Monique notes of her unabashed youthful approach to same-sex liaisons, it wasn't that queer desire was unheard of per se back in the day; what was scandalous was to declare it openly.

Like all of Lifshitz's subjects here, Monique is distinctive, sympathetic and occasionally provocative, her direct and thoughtful reminiscences illustrated with footage of her going about her daily business and archive material from her younger years. Other individuals include Christian, who was subjected to a grim Catholic upbringing and who became a prominent activist after being inadvertently outed in *Paris Match*, and Thérèse, reborn as a radical activist after decades as a dutiful housewife (we join her and her children for dinner). Perhaps most distinctive is gammy-eyed bisexual 83-year-old goatherd Pierrot, whose utterly open, pleasure-based attitude towards sex – of which he's had a lot in his gloriously self-made life – seems wholly in keeping with the bucolic settings in which we see him.

As this suggests, there's a balance between those who struggled to accept and act on their non-heterosexuality and those who took to it like the proverbial ducks to water. There are, of course, variations of experience within the couples interviewed too: Bernard had a series of older long-term partners throughout his life before meeting Jacques – who had been married with five children – when they were both over 70; of



Looking back: Bernard, Jacques

the youthful Pierre and Yann, the former spent many years in a depressing cycle of casual sex and alcohol while the latter was traumatised by his rejection by the communist milieu in which he grew up; Catherine and Elisabeth endured workplace discrimination in the city but have had only positive experiences running a farm together for 35 years (even if, initially, traditional farmers presumed each had had her heart broken by a man).

Generally, the material is fascinating, from reminders of the shocking repressions of the 1950s or exuberant radicalism of the 1970s to varying experiences of ageing sexuality (Monique regretfully packed it in at 50, Thérèse fell head over heels at 77) and elegant, wry observational details such as Bernard and Jacques squabbling or Pierrot singing in a field. There's tremendous variety here, then; how, in any honest attempt to present a survey of older gay lives, could there not be? Without a propulsive through-line, the film's momentum arguably lags over its lengthy running time, but given the dearth of depictions of older LGBT lives on the screen – not to mention the fact that social acceptance of homosexuality appears, apparently uniquely in western Europe, to be moving backwards in France – it's surely excusable to err on the side of generosity. Looking back is, after all, crucial to moving forward. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Bruno Nahon
Director of Photography
Antoine Parouty
Editing
Tina Baz
Pauline Gaillard
Sound
Yolande Decarsin
Philippe Mouisset

©Zadig Films, Sylicone, Rhône-Alpes Cinéma
Production Companies
Zadig Films in co-production with Rhône-Alpes Cinéma and Sylicone with the participation of Centre National du

Cinéma et de l'image animée et la Région Rhône-Alpes, with the support of la Région Ile-de-France In partnership with the CNC In association with Cinéma 6 A film by Sébastien Lifshitz
Executive Producer
Eugénie Michel
Film Extracts
La donna nel mondo (1963)
Ya qu'a pas baiser (1971)
Le F.H.A.R. (1971)
Manifestation contre la repression de l'homosexualité,

juin 1977
Le vent souffle où il veut (1973)
Actualités Gaumont (01.01.1973)

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Peccadillo Pictures

A documentary in which ten lesbian, gay and bisexual French people over the age of 70 – Pierrot, Thérèse, Christian, Monique and the couples Pierre and Yann, Bernard and Jacques and Catherine and Elisabeth – discuss their lives.

The Last Exorcism Part II

France/USA/Luxembourg 2013

Director: Ed Gass-Donnelly

Certificate 15 88m30 s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Making a sequel to a film with 'last' in the title invites mockery, and this quickie follow-up to the 2010 'found-footage' horror hit goes further, with ham-fisted CGI fireworks which simply underline the fact that the film doesn't have access to the budget that would allow for even a glimpse of a proper apocalypse. *The Last Exorcism Part II* dispenses with the found-footage angle, except when the other girls at the halfway house where troubled heroine Nell is staying discover extracts from the first film's events posted online and upset her by showing them to her.

Ashley Bell, held over from the first film, gives a decent performance but is stuck in the sort of woman-targeted-by-satanic-evil plot done to death in many *Rosemary's Baby* TV knockoffs. Indeed, the basic set-up was outlined by Daffy Duck in *The Duxorcist* (1987): "Did you hear about the girl who didn't pay her exorcism bill? Her soul got *repossessed*."

The early stages have a few acceptable shocks and creepy moments – a scene with a sinister living statue works well – but things become utterly ludicrous when Nell consults the movies' least helpful priest in a flyblown church and is ranted at. A voodoo priestess walks into the third act and delivers heavyhanded exposition to set up a chicken-sacrificing ritual that signally fails to solve anyone's problems. An implied end of the world presumably rules out a *Part III*. Or not. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Eric Newman
Eli Roth
Screenplay
Damien Chazelle
Ed Gass-Donnelly
Story
Damien Chazelle
Based on characters created by Huck Botko, Andrew Gurland
Director of Photography
Brendan Steacy
Editor
Ed Gass-Donnelly
Production Designer
Merideth Boswell
Music
Michael Wandmacher
Sound Mixer
BJ Lehn
Costume Designer
Abby O'Sullivan

©StudioCanal S.A. and Strike Entertainment, Inc.
Production Companies
StudioCanal/Strike Entertainment present in association with

Anton Capital Entertainment an Arcade Pictures production
Executive Producers
Olivier Courson
Ron Halpern
Gabrielle Neimand
Patty Long

Cast
Ashley Bell
Nell Sweetzer
Julia Garner
Gwen Spencer Treat Clark
Chris David Jensen
Calder Tarra Riggs
Cecile Louis Herthum
Louis Sweetzer
Muse Watson
Frank Merle
Erica Michelle Daphne Sharice Angelle Williams
Mo Boyana Balta
Lily Joe Chrest
Pastor Raeden Greer

Steph Judd Lormand
Jared E. Roger Mitchell
Jeffrey

Dolby Digital/ Datasat In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

7,965 ft +0 frames

French theatrical title
Le Dernier Exorcisme Part II

It is foretold that the world will end when an innocent willingly accepts the demon Abalam's advances. Nell Sweetzer, formerly possessed by Abalam, is at a halfway house for troubled women in New Orleans. The members of a voodoo cult attempt to purge the last of Abalam's influence over Nell. They try to kill her when the ritual fails, prompting her to invite the demon to take her over. She goes out into the world, spreading disaster.

Man of Steel

USA/United Kingdom 2013

Director: Zack Snyder

Certificate 12A 142m 50s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

In Bryan Singer's *Superman Returns* (2006), the last attempt to bring DC Comics' flagship character to the big screen, Brandon Routh was explicitly cast as the same Superman Christopher Reeve played in a quartet of films, confirmed by the reuse of footage of Marlon Brando from Richard Donner's *Superman* (1978) as the ghost of Jor-El. *Man of Steel* is a back-to-the-origins reboot, but its plot evokes *Superman II* (1980), which also dealt with the return of General Zod from the Phantom Zone (a Kryptonian prison dimension) and a battle for the fate of Earth.

Given that two vintage serials, four live-action TV series and many cartoon variants have hashed over the Superman saga – which DC has revised constantly ever since 1938 – there's a sense of precis in the long first act, which goes over doings on Krypton just before the planet blows up (here, it's the fault of Kryptonians using up their natural resources rather than a cosmic fluke) and Kal-El/Clark's growing to maturity in Kansas under the influence of his human parents. Screenwriter David S. Goyer (who co-wrote the story with Christopher Nolan) follows the structure set down in *Batman Begins* (2005), in which an adult hero has a jumble of fill-in-the-gaps flashbacks before the story really starts, with Superman's discovery of his alien origins and the arrival of the evil Kryptonians. Like Bruce Wayne, this hero is haunted by a superfluity of father figures: a hologram of Russell Crowe's Jor-El explains things; memories of Kevin Costner's human dad impart moral lessons; Zod acts in such a darkly avuncular way with Clark we expect a revelation that he was Jor-El's evil brother; and Laurence Fishburne's *Daily Planet* editor Perry White is set up to mentor the secret identity that Clark only takes on in the coda.

It's impossible for *Man of Steel* not to suffer from the ghosts of previous tellings – and this drabber (if stereoscopic), more solemn, less heartfelt take on the primal superhero story feels too much like a phantom of itself. When Costner's Pa Kent lets himself be killed in a Kansas twister rather than chance Henry Cavill's chiselled Clark revealing his powers to the world, it's less affecting than the fatal heart attack suffered by Glenn Ford which forced Reeve to learn the harsh lesson that even a Superman can't fix everything. Familiar characters like Lois and Perry, though well cast, barely register, and Jimmy Olsen is reimagined as a girl who gets trapped under rubble and stands about during the story of a lifetime without thinking to take a photograph. While Terence Stamp's Zod was wry and aloof in the Richard Donner *Superman* films, here Michael Shannon is simply a fanatical brute. For all his vaunted military genius, Zod's major tactic is blasting or thumping, and his crew are cannon fodder. Antje Traue's Faora, Zod's sidekick, displays the martial-arts prowess of the comic-book character she's based on, but manages to be a less complex, less interesting villain than the barely remembered original, a homicidal Kryptonian female separatist.

Cavill has a perfect Superman face but is straitjacketed by a script that makes him all power and angst and no charm or wonder. A religious angle is uncomfortably blatant, stressing he has

Monsters University

USA 2013
Director: Dan Scanlon
Certificate U 110m 26s

Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

The impressive PR campaign for Disney Pixar's prequel to 2001's *Monsters, Inc.* – including a fully functional mock-up of a US college website – has at least given audiences time to recover from misgivings about the university setting. (How disappointing to force the new film to play ball with college semiotics when the first was so conceptually original!) The young Mike and Sulley, enrolled at Monsters University, dream of working the Scare Floor at Monsters, Incorporated. Mike – conscientious, aiming high for a small guy – can't cope with the layabout Sulley and his fiendish, one-for-all roar. When a quarrel leads to the shattering of a priceless MU relic, both are suspended from their course, with only one way to regain their places: compete, together, in the campus-wide tournament, the Scare Games.

The film's real achievement is down to the storywriters, who have carefully insured the dignity of the two main characters. Tenderly brought to life by John Goodman and Billy Crystal, they are loveable and funny; intact. The animation is mostly just-OK. In theme, it's on the same page as *Monsters, Inc.* – making meaningful work of friendship, humility and self-belief – but seldom echoes or riffs off the first film's comic material. Not bad, then, for a late recall of a pillar of the Pixar canon. ☺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Kori Rae
Screenplay
Daniel Gerson
Robert L. Baird
Dan Scanlon
Story
Dan Scanlon
Daniel Gerson
Robert L. Baird
Directors of Photography
Camera:
Matt Aspbury
Lighting:
Jean-Claude Kalache
Film Editor
Greg Snyder
Production Designer
Ricky Nierva
Original Score Composed and Conducted by
Randy Newman
Sound Designer
Tom Myers
Supervising Animator
Scott Clark

@Disney Enterprises, Inc./Pixar
Production Companies
Disney presents a Pixar Animation Studios Film
Executive Producers
John Lasseter
Pete Docter
Andrew Stanton
Lee Unkrich

Sean P. Hayes
Terri Perry
Dave Foley
Terry Perry
Charlie Day
Art
Alfred Molina
Professor Knight

Dolby Atmos/ Datasat
In Colour
Prints by
DeLuxe
[1.85:1]

Voice Cast

Billy Crystal
Mike Wazowski
John Goodman
James P. Sullivan, 'Sulley'
Steve Buscemi
Randy Boggs
Helen Mirren
Dean Hardscrabble
Peter Sohn
Scott 'Squishy' Squibbles
Joel Murray
Don Carlton

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
Buena Vista International (UK)

9,939 ft +0 frames
(including short film *The Blue Umbrella*, running time circa 6 mins)

Mike and Sulley are scare majors – and rivals – at Monsters University in Monstropolis. Mike is hardworking, Sulley lazy but fearsome. Following an incident, they are suspended from the university's scaring programme. Making a deal with the dean, they team up with the Oozma Kappa fraternity to compete in the Scare Games: if crowned scariest students, they will reclaim their places on the programme. They win. However, Mike learns that Sulley cheated to spare him embarrassment. To prove himself, he trespasses into the human world, whereupon they both become trapped. They escape back to Monstropolis but are expelled for breaking the rules. Now best friends, they start work in the Monsters, Incorporated mailroom and ascend, by degrees, to the Scare Floor.



The great 'S' cape: Henry Cavill

been on Earth for 33 years before putting on a cape; and he discusses the quandary of whether to turn himself over to Zod with yet another father, this time a priest. The redesign of his outfit, without the red trunks and with a neoprene-look skinsuit, is in line with Superman's recent comics relaunch. The film's only joke (intentional?) finally confirms a longstanding jibe when Zod's armour is ripped away to reveal a similar, all-black outfit: so Superman's uniform is basically Kryptonian underwear. In a childhood flashback, young Clark is overwhelmed by his super-senses, having to learn from his mother – Diane Lane this time – how to focus; when Zod and his minions suffer from the same distraction, it's the handicap that enables Superman to defeat them.

The problem is that this is exactly what Zack Snyder's direction does to the audience – he overwhelms us with a monotonous succession of awesome sequences, full of exploding worlds, shattered streets, tumbling skyscrapers, mighty

blows and strenuous exercise of superhuman abilities. As with Snyder's *Sucker Punch* (2011), this approach makes for great trailers but a wearisome film. *Green Lantern* (2011) was DC's attempt to fit its squarer key characters into the kind of wiseass movie that Marvel has been making with its more flawed, 1960s-rooted heroes. This film takes a different, equally awkward approach and tries to present the company's vaunted icon of 'truth, justice and the American way' – would there were a phrase one-tenth as memorable in this flat script – as a broodier character in the mould of Nolan and Goyer's Dark Knight. But Superman has usually been the light to Batman's dark, and taking that away limits his appeal. *Man of Steel* crosses a that line Batman has drawn even on Nolan's watch when Superman summarily executes the villain, hinting at an even darker path should this be spun into a trilogy. One can't help but feel that in a better world, Brandon Routh would be outwitting Mr Mxyzptlk. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Charles Roven
Christopher Nolan
Emma Thomas
Deborah Snyder
Screenplay
David S. Goyer
Story
David S. Goyer
Christopher Nolan
Superman created by Jerry Siegel, Joe Shuster
Director of Photography
Amir Mokri
Edited by
David Brenner
Production Designer

Alex McDowell
Music
Hans Zimmer
Sound Design and Supervision
Scott Hecker
Eric A. Norris
Costumes Designed by
James Acheson
Michael Wilkinson
Visual Effects
Weta Digital Ltd
Double Negative
MPC
Scanline VFX
Stunt Co-ordinators
Tim Rigby
Damon Caro

@Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. and Legendary Pictures Funding, LLC
Production Companies
Warner Bros. Pictures presents in association with Legendary Pictures a Syncopy production A Zack Snyder film
With the participation of Province of British Columbia Production Services Tax Credit, Canadian Film or Video Production Services Tax Credit

Executive Producers
Thomas Tull
Lloyd Phillips
Jon Peters

Cast

Henry Cavill
Kal-El, Clark Kent, 'Superman'
Amy Adams
Lois Lane
Michael Shannon
General Zod
Kevin Costner
Jonathan Kent
Diane Lane
Martha Kent
Laurence Fishburne

Perry White
Antje Traue
Faora-Ul
Ayelet Zurer
Lara Lor-Van
Russell Crowe
Jor-El
Harry Lennix
General Swanwick
Richard Schiff
Dr Emil Hamilton
Christopher Meloni
Colonel Nathan Hardy

Dolby Digital/ DataSat/SDDS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
Warner Bros Distributors (UK)

12,855 ft +0 frames

Shortly before the planet Krypton's destruction, renegade general Zod attempts a coup and murders scientist Jor-El. A spaceship carries Jor-El's newborn son Kal-El to Earth, where the planet's different conditions bestow superpowers on him. Zod and his followers dematerialise; Krypton is destroyed.

On Earth, Kal-El is raised in Kansas by Jonathan and Martha Kent, who call him Clark and impress on him the importance of not revealing his powers to the world. As an adult, Clark finds an ancient Kryptonian ship in the Arctic where a computer simulation of Jor-El explains Clark's origins. Daily Planet reporter

Lois Lane tracks down Clark, realising that he is an alien, but agrees to keep the story quiet. When Zod reappears and demands that Earth surrender Kal-El, Clark willingly declares himself to the authorities and is turned over to the invaders. Zod intends to wipe out humanity and transform Earth into a replica of Krypton, using a codex that Jor-El concealed in Clark's DNA to spawn new generations of Kryptonians. Clark, who has picked up the nickname Superman, sides with humanity and battles against Zod's forces. When Zod threatens genocide, Clark breaks his neck. Clark takes a job as a reporter on the Daily Planet.

The Moo Man

United Kingdom 2013
Director: Andy Heathcote



The only whey is Sussex: Stephen Hook

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Observational documentaries are always a gamble. The filmmaker chooses to record a certain ongoing situation in the hope that dramatic conflict will manifest itself in the course of time, bringing to light themes and ideas for the audience to take away with them. Reality, needless to say, may or may not play ball, and it can be a headache for directors and editors trying to shape resulting footage into a dramatically cogent feature length.

Looked at in only those terms, Andy Heathcote and Heike Bachelier's portrait of an organic dairy farmer is somewhat problematic, since it's not exactly packed with crunching confrontation, nor indeed does it have quite enough material to fill its generous 98-minute running-time. The striking particularity of *The Moo Man*, however, is that these characteristics are of lesser significance than its telling rendering of the genuine emotional bond between farmer

Stephen Hook and his Friesian cattle. Indeed, it's primarily our emotional connection to the film that gets us thinking about the questions of farming practice and consumer choice – and even the broader arena of humanity's relationship with our four-legged friends – thus generating a viewer response so much larger than the decidedly intimate scale of what's on screen.

The skill of the filmmaking duo here is to choose a situation that keys into our perception of the ongoing crisis in the dairy industry in the UK, where public awareness of farmers going out of business because supermarkets have driven down milk prices doesn't necessarily translate into many of us opting not to pick up that 588ml of semi-skimmed from the chill cabinet on the way home. The Hook family operation shows that there is another way, selling a natural product to a local consumer base, and keeping the numbers down so that animal welfare is an achievable priority. What Hook calls "raw milk", bottled unpasteurised on site, may not be for everyone, since it comes with a health warning that it may contain microorganisms dangerous to pregnant women and so forth, yet the simple fact of seeing the whole production chain in motion gives the viewer something to ponder. Are we pouring something bland and sanitised on our cornflakes, when we could have some of this stuff instead?

It helps, though, that Hook himself exudes common-sense decency, and Ida, his favourite cow, is undoubtedly something of a character – transported to Eastbourne for a publicity shoot on the seafront, she simply refuses to get back in the trailer, prompting much knockabout huff and puff from Hook and his farmhands. Elsewhere there is the donning of veterinarian arm-length rubber gloves and several fairly elemental calving sequences, but what the direction really captures (highlighted by Stephen Daltry's charming Tati-esque chamber score) is the sheer comedic daintiness of the animals as they trot from field to milking shed. They are imposing yet somehow graceful, allowing us to understand why Hook is so attached to them, and the tears he sheds in the film's toughest moment so genuine and affecting. By the end, we're deeply touched too – evidence of a film whose impact comes not from trenchant argument or visceral conflict but from sheer loveliness. No coincidence, then, that Heathcote and Bachelier were successful in raising £20,000 in online crowdfunding to support the film's UK theatrical release. **S**

My Father and the Man in Black

Canada 2012
Director: Jonathan Holiff
Certificate 15 87m 25s

Reviewed by Sam Wigley

Pop-cultural history and personal catharsis are fused to intriguing effect in Jonathan Holiff's trawl through his father's archives. Newspaper cuttings, spoken tape recordings, letters, telegrams and a gold record of Johnny Cash's 1969 single 'A Boy Named Sue' shed more light on Saul Holiff and his relationship with Cash (whom he managed throughout the 1960s) than the director ever gleaned from his emotionally negligent dad in person.

The credits for *Walk the Line*, the 2005 biopic featuring Joaquin Phoenix as Cash and Reese Witherspoon as his eventual wife June Carter, list only anonymous A&R men and record executives among the cast as the music-industry types circulating around the country-music legend in his 1960s heyday, while Cash's own autobiography – the basis for *Walk the Line* – gives short shrift to Saul's significance in his story. But, crate-digging through Saul's storage locker after his death, Jonathan finds a copy of that autobiography, with a personal inscription from Cash to Saul: "We both know you're much more a part of our lives than is told here. Thank you for living it with me."

Though Holiff's film is no doubt an attempt to raise the profile of the man in the shadows behind the man in black, more vitally it is Holiff's effort to fill in his own blanks about an absentee father. When not travelling abroad, Saul would be closed off to his two sons, prematurely treating them like adults or business associates, communicating in notes passed under their bedroom doors,

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Jonathan Holiff	Productions Inc. Productions Inc.	<i>A Gunfight</i> (1970)
Producers Tanya Lyn Nazarek Jennifer Phillips	Production Companies Intentionally Left Blank in association with New Chapter Productions	<i>Gospel Road</i> (1972)
Written by Jonathan Holiff	Produced in association with Rogers and with the participation of Rogers	In Colour [1.85:1]
Editors Rob Ruzic Nick Harauz	Production Designer Adam Weir	Distributor Ballpark Film Distributors
Original Music Michael Timmins	Executive Producer Jeff Paikin	7,867 ft + 8 frames
Sound Design Daniel Pellerin	Film Extracts <i>Walk the Line</i> (2005)	
Costume Designer Robyn Rosenberg	<i>Eat the Document</i> (1972)	
	<i>Monsieur Beaucaire</i> (1946)	
©New Chapter		

A dramatised documentary following the quest of director Jonathan Holiff to find out more about his emotionally distant father Saul, who managed country singer Johnny Cash during the 1960s. The film begins with a re-enactment of Saul's suicide in 2005. With the Cash biopic 'Walk the Line' in cinemas at the time, media interest in Saul – a forgotten figure in the Cash story – prompts Jonathan to investigate the past of a father who left him nothing and never spoke about his history with the singer.

In his father's storage locker, Jonathan finds Cash memorabilia and letters and telegrams between Cash and Saul. Through these, he tells the story of his father's upbringing, his entrepreneurial prowess, his success as Cash's promoter and his turbulent relationship both with the troubled singer and with his own family.

Credits and Synopsis

Co-director Heike Bachelier	Stephen Daltry	In Colour [1.85:1]
Produced by Heike Bachelier Andy Heathcote	Post-production Sound Peter Hodges	Distributor November Films/ Trufflepig Films
Edited by Heike Bachelier	Production Company A Trufflepig Films production	

A documentary portrait of farmer Stephen Hook and his Friesian dairy herd. Eschewing prevalent industrial farming methods, Hook chooses not to sell his milk to supermarkets at below cost price, instead bottling his own raw milk, which he sells door-to-door and at organic markets. Also unusual is Hook's relationship with his cows, including his favourite, Ida, who shows her determined character when driven to the Eastbourne seafront for a publicity shoot to promote the dairy. Attracting much attention from passers-by, Ida subsequently refuses to leave when the day is over and has to be manhandled back into the trailer. Thus far spared the bovine TB which could lose him his licence to sell unpasteurised milk, Hook works long hours on his farm, not least when several of his heifers calve at the same time. Ida delivers her latest calf, and though she's coming to the end of her working life, Hook plans to keep her as a pet. However, she falls inexplicably ill, and despite the vet's best efforts she dies in the field surrounded by the other cows. Hook is devastated but vows to carry on, knowing that another favourite will soon emerge from the herd.



In a ring of fire: Johnny Cash, Saul Holiff, June Carter

getting them to sign contracts of good behaviour and itemising all the expenses of parenthood in order to claim back the costs from their matured trust funds.

Mixing archive footage with dramatic reconstructions, *My Father and the Man in Black* begins with a re-enactment of Saul's 2005 suicide, while footage of a concert at which Cash failed to show (Saul was there in the foyer handing out refunds to a furious audience) plays behind him as if on a giant plasma screen. This interplay of timeframes and visual planes is but one of the many formal devices that Holiff employs, his film busily exerting itself to bring drama to what might have been a dry rummage through boxes. There's barely a still photograph in the film that Holiff hasn't used motion control to breathe 3D life into.

Some of Holiff's technique gives an undesired patina of fakery to his investigations. He uses an actor to play Cash but we don't see his face; personal telegrams and letters sent from Cash to Saul are read out by a vocal impersonator, who is Cash but not

quite; and – since the decision to make the film obviously came after he'd completed his investigations – Holiff plays his adult self, sifting through boxes, ringing around for information, shaking his head with actorly frustration when he comes up against a brick wall.

It's the primary-source stuff that makes the film. Holiff finds reams of tape recordings of his father – a man who gave away so little in person – talking about his troubled life and his relationship with Cash; he even spots Saul playing Caiaphas in *Gospel Road* (1973), the oddball life-of-Christ film that the born-again country star made during a sojourn in the Holy Land, and wonders if Cash was making a pointed comment about his Jewish impresario. These are valuable discoveries in Holiff's excavation of the life of a man he barely knew, and while his documentary offers small insights into Cash's own troubled rise and fall from stardom, his pill addiction and waywardness, *My Father and the Man in Black* remains a private film, poignant and fascinating for the dispassionate viewer but an act of purgation for its creator. **Ⓔ**

Night of Silence

Turkey 2012
Director: Reis Çelik
Certificate PG 91m 42s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

"Which of us is more scared?" asks Ilyas Salman's elderly bridegroom at the end of what was intended to be his wedding night. By this stage in Reis Çelik's slow-burn two-hander, the balance of power has shifted to the point where he's come to see himself as no less a victim, maybe even more so, than his teenage bride. Shorn of his shaggy moustache and his masculinity along with it ("You took me for a man, didn't you?" he abjectly asks the girl. "You thought there was a man underneath"), wilting under the stern gaze of his father glaring from a photograph on the wall, he sits slumped on the bed as dawn breaks outside. Behind him, the girl, perhaps taking pity on him, has at last begun to undress, but it's too late.

Çelik's fifth feature, which picked up the Crystal Bear award at Berlin, plays out in a small village somewhere in Anatolia – presumably in the present day, though specific indicators are few. Tribal and family pressures are strong. We open in a windswept graveyard where the 60-year-old Damat, his broad, pockmarked, lugubrious face suggesting years of dumb suffering, gazes silently at two tombstones – the graves, we're later led to understand, of his own mother and a male 'enemy' for whose honour killings he was jailed. From there we're whisked into a noisy wedding celebration, all drums and shawms and ululating women, as Damat is rewarded for his obedience with a pretty 13-year-old bride, Gelin. This arranged marriage, he's told, will end the blood feud between his family and hers.

After this prelude, we never leave the bridal chamber until the final two minutes of the film. Çelik makes resourceful use of camera angles to avoid visual monotony in his confined space, first giving us several point-of-view shots as Gelin, nervously awaiting her groom, sits beneath her intricately worked blood-coloured veil and contemplates the hennaed palms of her hands, then varying his perspective as the ill-matched relationship shifts and develops through the night. In keeping with the austerity **➔**



Groom temperature: Ilyas Salman

of the narration there's no use of non-diegetic music, though expressionistically distorted sound effects accompany the nightmare sequence in which Damat desperately pursues his bride's sleigh across a snowfield, only to see her transform into his murdered mother.

Ilyas Salman as Damat and Dilan Aksüt as Gelin both give nuanced performances that invite our sympathy without recourse to easy pathos. Celik's script draws on elements of myth that enhance the sense of timelessness: the Scheherazade story is an obvious reference, and at one point Damat is led into telling Gelin a folktale (one that has parallels in many cultures besides Turkish) about a mortal who marries a seductive sea-creature but then becomes homesick. "Stories are enchanted," she reminds him when he tries to break off midway. "Once you've started you must finish." There's an inevitability, too, about Celik's story that becomes increasingly evident as the night wears on, and by the time the camera finally cuts to the exterior of Damat's house it has become clear what the outcome must be. The exact significance of the gunshot we hear isn't spelled out, but it's not hard to guess. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Anil Çelik

Written by

Reis Çelik

Director of Photography

Gökhan Tiryaki

Editor

Reis Çelik

Art Director

Burcu Karakas

Electronic Music

Anil Çelik

Sound Recording

Ekrem Çelik

Production Companies

KAZ Film

Executive Producers

Israfil Partak

Ekrem Çelik

Cast

Dilan Aksüt

Gelin, bride

Ilyas Salman

Damat, groom

Sabri Tural

uncle

Mayseker Yücel

sister-in-law

Sercan Demirkaya

childhood sweetheart

Ahmat Avdin

older brother

Volkan Sirin

guard

Sevilay Aydin

sister

Nazan Durmus

mother

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Verve Pictures

8,253 ft +0 frames

Turkish

theatrical title

Lal Gece

Present-day Anatolia. A 60-year-old man, Damat, newly out of jail after a long sentence for murder, returns to his native village. He's greeted by an older relative who tells him that a bride has been found for him; marrying her will end the blood feud between their families. After a noisy wedding celebration, the bride, 13-year-old Gelin, sits awaiting Damat in his bedroom. Her mother tells her to obey her new husband no matter how he treats her. Damat comes in and the mother leaves them alone together. Damat lifts Gelin's veil; he tells her that she's beautiful and not to be afraid. She says she's scared of the dark, gets him to tell her a folktale, and invites him to play cat's cradle.

Damat falls asleep and has a nightmare. When he wakes he starts to lose patience with his bride's delaying tactics. She says that she's afraid of his moustache. He shaves it off, which makes her laugh. He tells her that he's a fool, and that he was jailed for killing his mother and another man because the family elders ordered it. It grows light outside. While Gelin starts to undress, Damat sits on the bed cradling a revolver. The camera cuts to outside the house; a gunshot is heard. Two women come and knock for admittance but no one opens.

Now You See Me

USA/Canada 2013

Director: Louis Leterrier

Certificate 12A 115m 12s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

To catch, and hold, our attention, a good magician needs to make us believe what our eyes are telling us. Too bad then that Louis Leterrier's noisy, nonsensical heist movie about a crew of robber-magicians flabbergasting the FBI is so visually and narratively tricky that we don't believe a damn thing about it, whether the action is off stage or on. *Now You See Me* is equally infatuated with the big scam, as seen in caper movies like *Ocean's Eleven* (2001), and the big stage-illusion, as seen in *The Prestige* (2006). However, both these features require a certain lightness of touch to pull off successfully, and Leterrier's film is as hamfisted as the most amateur magician. Its only flicker of easy, breezy charm, expressed early on as its quartet of down-on-their-luck magicians are recruited, is a cruel feint. It surfaces with Woody Harrelson's cynical 'mentalist' genially manipulating a hypnosis victim while simultaneously blackmailing her adulterous husband for a fistful of dollars. This type of hustle and wit disappears rapidly, though, as the film morphs into a tedious cat-and-mice tale in which a trio of grandiose robberies are mounted as supersized stage illusions, and Mark Ruffalo's exasperated G-man is repeatedly stumped in his lumbering pursuit of the criminals.

The stage illusions themselves have a glitzy gigantism that alienates rather than intrigues the viewer. An innocent is 'teleported' into a Parisian bank vault for a robbery, and giant cheques mysteriously spin their contents into the bank accounts of Hurricane Katrina survivors. But neither is as intriguing as the audaciously simple card trick with which Jesse Eisenberg opens the movie. If we care little for the stage spectacles, we care less for the characters, since after the first act Leterrier and his screenwriters largely abandon the magicians in favour of Ruffalo. This is a misfire, not a piece of clever



Quantitative teasing: Jesse Eisenberg

misdirection. The essence of a caper is that the viewer roots for the crew (even in the similarly overcomplicated *Ocean's Thirteen*, Danny is our boy). An even bigger mistake is the decision to layer in elaborate explanations of each robbery by Morgan Freeman's twinkly-eyed magic-debunker. A single neat reveal (like the elegant simplicity of, say, *The Thomas Crown Affair's* ingenious art-replacement caper) would have made the film feel less episodic.

Leterrier, best known for the muscular *Transporter* movies, is at his best in the action sequences. A whumping fight scene between Ruffalo and Dave Franco's agile magician raises the film's pulse more than any amount of Vegas showmanship. Nonetheless, its addiction to corkscrew plotting and tiresomely choppy editing ensures that it delivers rapidly diminishing dramatic returns. Having exhausted every narrative possibility, the film's ultimate reveal about the identity of the Fifth Horseman, the plan's mastermind, is predictably preposterous. Less of an 'aha' moment than a 'ha-ha' one, it leaves you wishing that *Now You See Me* had hidden something craftier and less risible up its sleeve. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Alex Kurtzman

Roberto Orci

Bobby Cohen

Screenplay

Ed Solomon

Boaz Yakin

Edward Ricourt

Story

Boaz Yakin

Edward Ricourt

Directors of Photography

Larry Fong

Mitchell Amundsen

Editors

Robert Leighton

Vincent Tabillon

Production Designer

Peter Wenham

Music

Brian Tyler

Sound Mixer

Danny Michael

Costume Designer

Jenny Eagan

Production Companies

Summit

Entertainment

presents a K/O Paper

Products production

A Louis Leterrier film

With the participation

of the Canadian Film

or Video Production

Services Tax Credit,

Province of British

Columbia Production

Services Tax Credit

Executive Producers

Boaz Yakin

Michael Schaefer

Stan Wlodkowski

Cast

Jesse Eisenberg

J. Daniel Atlas

Mark Ruffalo

Dylan Rhodes

Woody Harrelson

Merritt McKinney

Melanie Laurent

Alma Dray

Isla Fisher

Henley Reeves

Dave Franco

Jack Wilder

Michael Caine

Arthur Tressler

Morgan Freeman

Thaddeus Bradley

Common

Evans

Michael Kelly

Agent Fuller

José Garcia

Etienne Forcier

David Warshofsky

Cowan

Dolby Digital/

Datasat

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

E1 Films

10,368 ft +0 frames

US, present day. An unknown benefactor enlists four street magicians, giving them blueprints to stage illusion shows as 'The Four Horsemen'. Their first Las Vegas show features an ingenious robbery of Paris bank Crédit Républicain. FBI agent Dylan and his Interpol partner Alma enlist TV magic-debunker Thaddeus Bradley to explain the scam, but can prove nothing. The second magic show in New Orleans steals \$140 million from the Horsemen's wealthy insurance backer Arthur Tressler, and gives it to Hurricane Katrina victims. Thaddeus starts working for Tressler. Dylan tracks the Four Horsemen to their New York HQ. Young magician Jack is killed after a car chase with Dylan. Jack's papers lead to a giant safe belonging to Tressler's company Elkhorn, which the FBI seize and find empty. Alma and Dylan are attracted to one another. Jack reappears for the third magic show on a New York rooftop, which showers the crowd with (fake) money. The multimillion-dollar contents of the safe turn up in Thaddeus's car. He is arrested. Thaddeus explains Jack's faked death, and how the Four must have stolen the safe using illusions – Thaddeus was not involved. Dylan admits to the imprisoned Thaddeus that he is the criminal mastermind. He inducts the Horsemen into the magician cult the Eye of Horus. In Paris, he confesses to Alma that he devised the plot to revenge himself on Thaddeus, Tressler, Elkhorn Safes and Crédit Républicain, all involved long ago in the death of his magician father. Alma keeps his secret.

Paris-Manhattan

France 2011
Director: Sophie Lellouche
Certificate 12A 77m 32s

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

"I've always been open to acting in other people's films, but no one ever asks me," Woody Allen told press last year. So appearing in Sophie Lellouche's directorial debut might have been a no-brainer rather than a tremendous favour – especially given that Allen enjoys such a long-established mutual love affair with French cinema culture and that Lellouche has doubly flattered him by casting him as the king of romantic comedy and love guru to a beautiful young woman. Still, he's an odd fit for such a fluffy film. His own films tend to defy romcom conventions, after all – couples might meet cute but they grow bored, cheat, separate; marriage is more often a trap than a happy ending. And as to his own credentials as an adviser on relationship management... well, the film tacitly acknowledges their questionability by having him tell his acolyte Alice: "You have to make your own moral choices, even when they do require real courage." Yet Alice is stringently conventional in matters of sex, as is evidenced when she spies on both her brother-in-law and niece to root out shadiness in their sex lives, and reacts with disgust to the discovery that her sister likes threesomes. (One assumes that *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* isn't her favourite Allen film.)

Elsewhere, *Paris-Manhattan* displays considerable charm, particularly through the performances of its appealing and well-chosen cast, but also a problematic flatness on the level of plotting and emotional development. It muffles and sanitises the revelation that Alice's soignée mother Nicole is a secret alcoholic, passing her condition off as improbably responsive to cuddles and grapefruit juice; pointlessly repeats the non-event that is the unmasking of niece Laura's mysterious lover; throws away the drama of both a robbery and a car crash; and, worst of all, hobbles the final romantic gesture of Alice's suitor Victor by having him prewarn her of her coming surprise. At one stage, the film promisingly



Paris match: Alice Taglioni, Patrick Bruel

places Alice as a sort of cinephile Amélie Poulain, prescribing movies rather than medicine to the patrons of the family pharmacy that she runs. This would have been a nice unifying concept for a scattered-feeling film, but it's used only in passing, while elsewhere the sense of Alice as an obsessive cinephile fails to permeate the film. Even her Woody Allen preoccupation rings oddly hollow: she doesn't have an especially Allen-esque demeanour or worldview – the shared sensibility seems to come down largely to a fondness for jazz and Cole Porter.

Shot by Laurent Machuel, *Paris-Manhattan* certainly looks attractive, and Alice Taglioni and Patrick Bruel have no trouble in making you hope that their characters will overcome the minor obstacles to their togetherness. But by eschewing the jaded wit of its purported inspiration in favour of a rather prissy approach to matters of the heart and loins, it renders itself an oddly toothless tribute. ☹

Play

Sweden/Denmark/France/Germany/Norway 2011
Director: Ruben Östlund

Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

Swedish director Ruben Östlund's makes a meal of impartiality with his latest film, a reconstruction of a real-life case of petty theft in Gothenburg. *Play* follows five black teenagers who intimidate three kids for fun and for gain in a well-rehearsed game of playing to 'type'. Deploying to their advantage the stereotype of the African immigrant in Sweden, the boys intelligently terrorise their victims (two white, one Asian), whose fear – a naturalised racism – makes them martyrs to manipulation. All members of a local football team, the five teens play-act complex roles – the bully, the diplomat, the soft touch and so on – with the aim of making off with their victims' mobile phones and anything else they might be carrying of monetary value. In the end, he who performs the most effectually wins first pick of the spoils.

The corrupting effects of marginalisation and the clear-sightedness of the five in turning it into power are what fascinates Östlund, as well as the relatively obvious: there's more to right and wrong than meets the eye. How should we apportion guilt when the offenders are themselves victims? Östlund likes to leave this and other questions open-ended. This is the very point of *Play* – to show but never tell. The camera lens records but doesn't see except for an occasional pan on a horizontal axis, it stays in position for long, lagging minutes at a time. The players pass in and out of frame, obscured. The inner-city locations are void and industrial: beige. If Östlund's intention was to free his audience to wrestle with their own opinions, it hasn't worked. There's a line between neutrality and abstinence for art's sake, and Östlund has crossed it. A drily intellectual experiment, *Play* shows contempt for its medium. What praise for avoidance, for clearing the pratfalls of political correctness?

It's hard to believe that the film provoked any more discussion on its release than did the real-life court case on which it's based, but it did. By resisting pushing buttons or trying to resolve the concerns at its core, it sailed over the heads of its paying audience and into the hands of the Swedish press, which debated its issues unevenly. Was it racist? Yes. No. The film's ending in particular caused controversy. In a coda of sorts, two white fathers take matters into their own hands, publicly tussling with a young black boy and taking back

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Philippe Rousselet

Screenplay

Sophie Lellouche

Director of

Development/

Photography

Laurent Machuel

Editor

Monica Coleman

Art Director

Philip L'Évêque

Original Music

Jean-Michel Bernard

Sound

Laurent Poirier

Vincent Guillon

Costume Designer

Fabienne Katany

©Vendôme

Production, France

2 Cinéma, SND

Production

Companies

Philippe Rousselet

presents a Vendôme

Production, France

2 Cinéma, SND

co-production

With the participation

of Canal+, Ciné+,

France Télévisions

In association with

A Plus Image 3,

Palatine Étoile 9

Developed with

the participation

of Developimage

Film Extracts

Hannah and Her

Sisters (1986)

Every Thing You

Always Wanted

to Know about

Sex* *But Were

Afraid to Ask

(1972)

Manhattan Murder

Mystery (1993)

Cast

Alice Taglioni

Alice

Patrick Bruel

Victor

Marine Delterme

Hélène

Michel Aumont

father

Louis-Do de

Lencquesaing

Pierre

Marie-Christine

Adam

mother

Jacques Herlin

Mr Aknin

Yannick Soulier

Vincent

Margaux Chatelier

Laura

Gladys Cohen

Mrs Gozlan

Arsène Mosca

Arthur

Paul-Edouard

Gondard

Achille

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Cinefile

6,978 ft +0 frames

Paris, around 15 years ago. Cynical teenager Alice seeks life lessons from Woody Allen films. She falls for Pierre but he marries her sister Hélène. Ten years later, Alice, still single, takes over the family business, a pharmacy. She befriends security technician Victor but starts seeing Vincent, a glamorous friend of Pierre's. After a dinner with Alice and her family, Victor tells Alice that Pierre is cheating on Hélène; Alice's parents come to the same conclusion. Alice gets Victor to help her break into Pierre and Hélène's house to seek evidence of his infidelity; Alice's mother and father turn up there too. Victor finds an escort's business card. Afterwards he observes to Alice that her mother has a drinking problem. Victor sees Pierre meeting a woman at a hotel, and summons Alice. Hélène arrives too: the couple are seeing the escort together. Alice's father acknowledges that his wife is an alcoholic. Victor kisses Alice, but she walks away. Hélène worries about her teenage daughter Laura, who is seeing the mysterious Achille; she and Alice follow them and are relieved that Achille is young and unthreatening. Alice confronts Hélène about her sex life and they argue. Victor, summoned to fix a lock on a hotel-room door, finds that the occupant is Woody Allen. Victor asks Allen for advice on wooing Alice, and resolves to bring her to see her hero. After a road collision with Laura and Achille, Alice arrives too late to meet Allen, but she and Victor kiss. Allen, returning for something, gives them his enthusiastic blessing.



Lost boys: 'Play'

➔ a mobile phone presumed stolen from one of their own. The men are then themselves confronted by two white women, enraged by this persecution of an innocent refugee. It's a nasty scene, and we feel sympathy for the boy, hating to see him dominated. But it's too late – we've long ago taken leave of feeling, supine in a state of dispassion thanks to Ostlund's moribund, slumberous, middle-aged approach. (In Haneke's hands, it might have been a far more interesting film – if Haneke hadn't already put his finger on it with *Funny Games* and *Hidden*.) Without doubt, though, the young cast put in superb, natural performances – especially Kevin Vaz as the sharpest of the five and Anas Abdurahman as his youngest ally.

Perhaps the significance of the immigration issue in Sweden is lost in translation. But the film would have done better to struggle openly with the feelings rising out of it than stifle them altogether. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Erik Hemmendorff
Philippe Bober
Screenplay
Ruben Östlund
Director of Photography
Marius Dyrwad
Editors
Ruben Östlund
Jacob Schulsinger
Production Designer
Pia Aleborg
Original Music
Saunders Jurrans
Daniel Bensi
Sound
Jens de Place Björn
Costume Designer
Pia Aleborg

With the support of Svenska Filminstitutet, Det Danske Filminstitut, ZDF/Arte, Nordisk Film & TV Fond
A film by Ruben Östlund
Produced by Plattform Produktion
Developed with the support of the MEDIA Programme of the European Union and Konstnärsmännen
Executive Producers
Jessica Ask
Gunnar Carlsson
Alexander Bohr
Peter Possne

Abdi Nana Manu
Nana John Ortiz
John Kevin Vaz
Kevin

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Soda Pictures

@[TBC]
Production Companies
A Coproduction
Office ApS,
Parisienne de
Production, Film
i Väst, Sveriges
Television, Sonet
Film co-production

Cast
Anas Abdurahman
Anas
Sebastian Blyckert
Sebastian
Yannick Diakite
Yannick
Sebastian Hegmar
Alex
Abdiaziz Hilowle

Sweden, present day. In a Gothenburg shopping mall, five black teens circle two white boys, one of whom nervously agrees to show them his mobile phone, responding to their claim that a phone just like it was stolen from their younger brother. The black boys repeat 'the little brother' act with trio Sebastian, Alex and John, who warily accompany them to visit the brother and ask his opinion about the phone. As they walk through the city's backstreets, the black boys, by turns aggressive and placatory, toy with and humiliate the other boys. Boarding a tram, the eight are set upon by older men, who steal one of their phones in full view of other passengers. Later, getting off a bus in the open countryside, the black boys suggest that the two groups race for their pooled belongings and, cheating, win. The black boys share out the items (phones, wallets, a clarinet, designer jeans) according to the merits of their performances that day. Allowed to go home, the three other boys are fined for fare evasion.

A few days later, two white fathers accost a young African boy, mugging him for a phone they presume stolen from their children. At school, John plays a new clarinet.

The Purge

USA/France/Japan 2013
Director: James DeMonaco
Certificate 15 85m 16s

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

James DeMonaco's dystopian satire *The Purge* envisages an American dream built on the 'sacrifice' of a disposable underclass. During the 12 hours of the annual Purge, anyone can be killed with impunity – though the legislature is exempt, and the affluent can afford to lock down in their well-protected homes or to treat 'the hunt' as mere sport, leaving the economically marginalised the easiest prey. As a gated community's WASP-ish, over-entitled youths and pettily resentful curtain-twitchers resort to bloody murder and prove to be blithely willing torturers and executioners, James Sandin (Ethan Hawke) and his family may find both themselves and their middle-class values under siege, but the principal victim, as well as the film's moral centre, is a homeless African-American war veteran (Edwin Hodge), marked in every way as Other on these manicured lawns.

Like Scott Stewart's recent *Dark Skies* and Adam Wingard's *You're Next*, DeMonaco's film shows post-crunch American genre cinema turning an anxious gaze on bourgeois insecurity and class division. It's just a pity that the toxic social allegory promised here is soon abandoned for lazier home-invasion thrills and siege scenarios reboiled from DeMonaco's screenplays for *The Negotiator* (1998) and the *Assault on Precinct 13* remake (2005). **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Jason Blum
Sébastien K. Lemercier
Michael Bay
Andrew Form
Brad Fuller
Written by
James DeMonaco
Director of Photography
Jacques Jouffret
Edited by
Peter Gvozdas
Production Designer
Melanie Paizis-Jones
Music
Nathan Whitehead
Production Sound Mixer
Edward Tise
Costume Designer
Lisa Norcia

@Overlord Productions, LLC
Production Companies
Universal Pictures
presents a Platinum
Dunes/Blumhouse/
Why Not Production

Presented in association with
Dentsu Inc./
Fuji Television
Network, Inc.

Cast
Ethan Hawke
James Sandin
Lena Headey
Mary Sandin
Adelaide Kane
Zoey Sandin
Max Burkholder
Charlie Sandin
Edwin Hodge
bloody stranger
Rhys Wakefield
polite leader
Tony Oller
Henry
Arija Bareikis
Mrs Grace Ferrin
Tom Yi
Mr Cali
Chris Mulkey
Mr Halverson
Tisha French
Mrs Halverson
Dana Bunch
Mr Ferrin
Peter Gvozdas

Dr Peter Buynak

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures
International
UK & Eire

7,674 ft +0 frames

The US, 2022. On the night of the annual Purge, a legalised 'countrywide catharsis' of mayhem and murder, security salesman James Sandin, wife Mary and children Zoey and Charlie lock themselves in their home. Zoey's boyfriend Henry is killed confronting a disapproving James. Meanwhile a posse of local bourgeois co-eds besiege the house demanding a homeless veteran whom Charlie has admitted. After much soul-searching, James and Mary decide to defend the veteran and their home. After James is killed by the intruders, envious neighbours intervene, wanting to kill the remaining Sandins themselves. Mary and the veteran overpower – and spare – the neighbours.

Trap for Cinderella

United Kingdom/USA 2011
Director: Iain Softley
Certificate 15 99m 55s

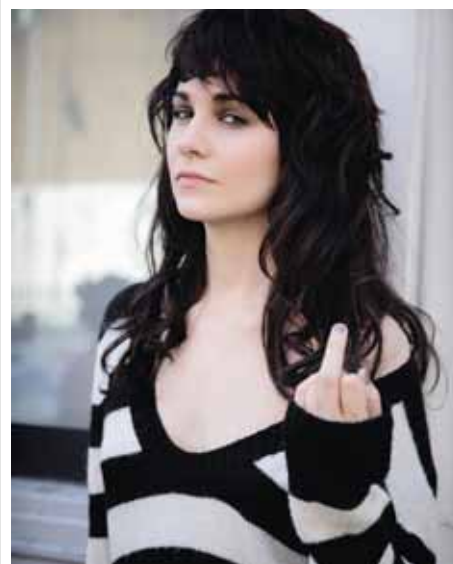
See industry section, page 14

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Based on a 1962 novel by Sébastien Japrisot, *Trap for Cinderella* occupies that breathy melodramatic netherworld in which friendship between two females must entail them dressing up as one another, plotting acts of violence and continually trembling on the verge of having a snog. *Single White Female* (1992), *Heavenly Creatures* (1994) and *Black Swan* (2010) have all been here before.

The plot is the sort of overstretched, overheated psychological thriller that might have appealed to Alfred Hitchcock around the time of the novel's publication; but even he would have had trouble making its wilder excesses emotionally plausible. This version – scripted and directed by Iain Softley and one of the last projects to be backed by the now defunct UK Film Council's Film Fund – attempts to Hitchcock things up with relentless use of Christian Henson's hectic score, but a failure to access much in the way of either intense feeling or pleasurable self-mockery leaves an untenable plot all too exposed.

The story is shunted forward by a demanding twist followed by a no less problematic counter-twist; neither is brought to light by character behaviour or spontaneous development, but by a labyrinth of flashbacks and tortuous verbal explanations. A scenario that needed both hot-blooded emotional conviction and storytelling dexterity to stand a chance of functioning persuasively is thus rendered jumpy and overworked. Is the scarred survivor of a deliberately set gas explosion sex-kitten heiress Micky or her lumpen, adoring childhood pal Do? To reach a final answer, the audience must not only buy that someone might be able to arrange to have herself utterly disfigured but not killed in an accident – and that reconstructive plastic surgery could be expected to disguise completely convincingly one woman as another – but also endure an onslaught of overheard phone calls, taped conversations, loudly dropped clues and helpfully expository if-it-wasn't-for-you-pesky-kids-style confessions. Dialogue is dismal,



Up the ante: Tuppence Middleton

Venus and Serena

USA 2012

Directors: Maiken Baird, Michelle Major
Certificate 12A 99m 20s



Sisters in lawn: Venus Williams, Serena Williams

whether it's Micky's lover Jake (Aneurin Barnard, highly billed but barely there) acknowledging her near-death, facial disfigurement and total amnesia with a perky "I heard about everything..." or Micky's guardian Julia (Kerry Fox) explaining a few things to Do: "Micky told your father about your father's affair with Elinor! Surely that must have had something to do with why he committed suicide!"

This stuff is almost so-bad-it's-good, but finally lacks the element of fun. A potboiler shouldn't feel like such hard work. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Robert Jones Dixie Linder Iain Softley	Aegis Film Fund, Altus Productions, Prescience, Ealing Metro International and Lipsync Productions present a Forthcoming Films and Jonescompany Production in association with Odd Lot Entertainment A film by Iain Softley Developed in association with Film4 Made with the support of the UK Film Council's Development Fund and Film Fund UK Film Council Lottery Funded	Norman Merry
Screenplay Iain Softley Based on the novel [<i>Piège pour Cendrillon</i>] by Sébastien Japrisot		
Director of Photography Alex Barber		
Editor Stuart Gazzard		
Production Design Gary Williamson		
Composer Christian Henson		
Production Sound Mixer Martin Trevis		
Costume Design Verity Hawkes		
©The British Film Institute/Trap for Cinderella Limited	Executive Producers Gigi Pritzker Bill Lischak Lee Vandermolen Motti Colman Peter Nichols Anne Sheehan Anders Erden Peter Hampden	
Production Companies UK Film Council in association with		
	Dolby Digital In Colour [1.85:1]	
	Distributor Lionsgate UK	
	8,992 ft +8 frames	

The South of France, the present. A gas explosion in a rural house propels a burning body from a window. In a clinic in Switzerland, a scarred woman awakes with amnesia, and is told that she is Michelle Dean, known as Micky. Julia, PA to Micky's wealthy aunt Elinor, arrives to take Micky home to London. On meeting up with her lover Jake, Micky learns that her close friend Do died in the explosion. At her own flat, Micky finds Do's diary. Flashbacks show how the two childhood friends met again by chance and formed a close bond, despite lifestyle differences; Do made friends via letter with Elinor, and reported on Micky's wild lifestyle.

Julia reveals to the amnesiac 'Micky' that she is in fact Do; Julia and Do plotted to kill Micky in the explosion, pass Do off as Micky and claim her inheritance from Elinor. Flashbacks show that on a trip to see Elinor in the South of France, Do ensured that Micky was drunk and drugged before setting the explosion.

Julia and Micky/Do go back to France for the reading of Elinor's will. Micky/Do meets a local bartender who explains to her that he tipped her off about Julia and Do's plan after overhearing a phone call between them. She escaped the fire; she is Micky after all. Micky tells Julia that they have been found out. Julia reveals that Elinor left all her money to Do in any case. Micky records Julia admitting to murder, sends the tape to her solicitor and tells Julia that she has done so. They fight; Julia tries to drown Micky in the swimming pool but is herself killed by a blow to the head. A flashback shows that Do, at the last minute, encouraged Micky to escape the fire.

Micky goes swimming in the sea, finally confirming that she can't be Do, who couldn't swim.

Reviewed by Geoffrey Macnab

There are several elements to *Venus and Serena* that help it to transcend the typical sports documentary. Venus and Serena Williams are engaging if spiky personalities, but this is also a very pointed story about race and class. As their movie-producer friend Arnon Milchan puts it, this is a Cinderella story about African-American girls going "straight to the heart of the white man's land" and kicking "their butts".

Richard Williams, father of the tennis-playing prodigies, states: "I wrote a plan before they were born, 78 pages, and the plan was for Venus to be champion." He's an eccentric and driven figure who pushed his daughters to excel at tennis from a very early age, when they were growing up in Compton, a rough area of LA as far removed from the typical tennis country club as you can imagine. His training methods

were questionable (one of his stranger exercises was to get Venus and Serena to throw tennis rackets to strengthen their arms), but the sisters' obsessive dedication to their sport clearly comes from him. At the same time, their mother Oracene Price (who divorced Richard in 2002) helped to foster their political consciousness. "I wanted them to be women of colour and to be proud of who they are and not let anyone make them ashamed," Price tells the filmmakers.

The documentary makes it clear that the white tennis world was initially very cagey in its attitude towards the sisters. There is shocking footage of Serena being booed at the 2001 Indian Wells tournament after Venus made a last-minute withdrawal. We see their opponents bumping them, scowling at them and accusing them of being "cocky" (a gibe with obvious racist undertones).

Directors Maiken Baird and Michelle Major begin the film with archive footage of Venus and Serena as doe-eyed kids in 1990, discussing their ambitions to become tennis players. This gives us a sense of the obstacles they've had to overcome. As they grew older they took on, on court at least, some of the belligerence of their father, whose behaviour – browbeating photographers and interviewers – is frequently shown to be obnoxious. The Wyclef Jean music running through the film has lyrics referring to the sisters as "warriors", which is exactly what they needed to become.

The filmmakers were given extraordinary access to the sisters' lives off court, and happened to be filming in 2011 – a particularly turbulent year even by the Williams sisters' standards. Both had problems with illness and injury, and when making her comeback Serena disgraced herself with a tirade against a line judge (although, as observers have pointed out, it was no worse than the outbursts of white male players such as John McEnroe and Jimmy Connors).

The sisters' monomaniacal devotion to tennis is apparent throughout the film. Their Svengali-like father may have seen the sport as a way to better their lives, but they clearly don't regard it as a means to an end. Both are now in their thirties. Given their wealth, they could long since have retired but instead they carry on. Neither is married. There are fleeting references to their religion and their interest in fashion, but clearly what matters to them most is the game they were introduced to in such unlikely circumstances in Compton all those years ago. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Maiken Baird Michelle Major	David Hocs Andre Logan Eric Moorman Caleb Mose Paul Reed Mark Roy	Executive Producer Alex Gibney
Directors of Photography Cliff Charles Rashidi Harper Stephanie Johns		
Edited by Sam Pollard	©[TBC]	
Music Wyclef Jean	Production Companies M+M Films presents a film by Maiken Baird	Dolby Digital In Colour and Black and White
Sound Mixers		Distributor Kaleidoscope Film Distribution
		8,940 ft +0 frames

A documentary about Venus and Serena Williams, who rose from a poor background in Compton, Los Angeles, to become top-ranked tennis players. The filmmakers follow them through the 2011 season while flashing back to their childhood and teenage years.

Featuring interviews with former US president Bill Clinton, ex-tennis champions John McEnroe and Billie Jean King and comedian Chris Rock, the film chronicles the sisters' rise to sporting superstardom. We see footage of their father Richard coaching them as children. Richard experienced racism growing up in Louisiana, and as black athletes the sisters have also faced prejudice (most notably at the 2001 Indian Wells tournament). Serena talks about growing up in the shadow of older sister Venus. The pair reflect on the death of their sister Yetunde, who was killed in a shooting in Los Angeles in 2003.

The 2011 season is difficult for both sisters: Serena's comeback after a serious illness is marred when she loses her temper at the US Open; Venus struggles with an auto-immune disease. Nonetheless, the film ends with Serena taking the 2012 singles title at Wimbledon and winning the doubles with her sister a few hours later.

Viramundo A Musical Journey with Gilberto Gil

Switzerland/France/USA/United Kingdom 2012
Director: Pierre-Yves Borgeaud

Reviewed by Ashley Clark

Pierre-Yves Borgeaud's *Viramundo* is the second recent documentary to feature Gilberto Gil, the legendary Brazilian musician who in 2003 made history by becoming the country's first black minister of culture (he resigned in 2008 to resume his artistic career). However, unlike Marcelo Machado's *Tropicalia*, which provided a sprightly and detailed look at Gil's complex musical and political history, *Viramundo* is set entirely in the present, and takes the form of a cultural travelogue with Gil in the role of host/interlocutor rather than conventional subject.

Based on an idea by producer/cameraman Emmanuel Gétaz, *Viramundo* follows Gil to three distinct indigenous communities (in Australia, South Africa and Brazil) to test the singer's hypothesis that shared musical encounters can reveal historical and political links between peoples who have been subjected to colonisation at various points in their history. The premise is certainly an intriguing one, and allows for a range of enjoyably diverse musical sequences. Sadly, however, the whole endeavour seems bedevilled from the off by the distinct lack of any steering authorial hand; there's no overarching voiceover and almost no concrete historical information to guide us. Consequently, the film displays a kind of geopolitical gloss; in searching for the connections that bind the experiences of the colonised, it fails to engage adequately with the marked differences between such communities and their histories, and resorts to sweeping generalisations (not least the early description of Brazil as a multicultural utopia). This general woolliness contributes to a tone of rather earnest blandness, which on more than one occasion brings to mind the semi-cringeworthy tenor of a Comic Relief montage.

It seems odd, too, to frame an entire film around a single figure's personal journey while furnishing us with so little information about him. Gil is a likeable and serene presence, but he




Pioneer spirit: Gilberto Gil

isn't interviewed or contextualised, and as a result it's through accident rather than design that we find out about his history – he occasionally lets slip a nugget of telling personal info. More details about his explicitly political past (he was arrested by the Brazilian military government in 1969, and spent time in exile in London) would certainly have helped to strengthen the film's sociopolitical connective tissue. On the plus side, the film's determinedly low-key approach helps to circumvent the hagiographic hero-worship that can mar this kind of project, even if it does leave the viewer uninitiated and grasping for clues.

Despite the lack of focus engendered by the film's approach, the idea of music as an international language is articulated in a number of sequences featuring Gil and his long-time percussionist Gustavo di Dalva embarking on thrillingly wordless jam sessions with local musicians. A particularly enjoyable example finds Gil performing with the mixed-culture MIAGI orchestra in Johannesburg. Interviews with various individual figures with personal stories to tell (including indigenous Australian singer Shellie Morris and South African anti-apartheid musical icon Vusi Mahlasela) fill out the rest of the film.

As well as aural pleasures, the film affords visual treats; all the globetrotting allows for some breathtaking views of various beautiful natural and urban landscapes, often from high up on hills or buildings, captured with a crisp, digital sheen by Gétaz's camera. There's also at least one moment of genuine ingenuity in the film language: moments after an Aboriginal man has spoken passionately about the difficulty of maintaining the balancing act between indigenous and western cultures, we cut to a shot of a crocodile emerging from water to gobble up a fish. It's a startling example of associative, impressionistic editing, which, while at odds with the rest of the film's formally linear approach, evokes a real sense of dread.

Ultimately, the film only occasionally achieves the transcendental power it so clearly aspires to. "How did it happen that you were a minister of the arts?" an Aboriginal leader asks Gil, "You are black." Gil pauses for reflection and replies, almost beatifically, "This is the time of change. In my country, black people were brought as slaves... now we can have a black minister." The Aboriginal man seems bewildered by the possibility. This haunting exchange constitutes *Viramundo*'s most moving moment, eloquently crystallising complex, enduring issues of post-colonial identity without recourse to the earnest generalities that frequently surface elsewhere. 

Wadjda

Germany/Saudi Arabia/USA/United Arab Emirates 2012
Director: Haifaa al Mansour

See feature
on page 28

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Narratively, *Wadjda* is of a type rather than trailblazingly original: the earnest but gently comic tone as well as the content of Samira

Makhmalbaf's films is particularly recalled, as is the emotional trajectory of the 'kids compete' documentary strain so beloved by festivals since the success of *Spellbound* (2002). Still, Haifaa al Mansour's debut merits recognition for its fresh-feeling take on the trope whereby the travails of a child protagonist mirror those of a wider society. It also has a place in the history books as the first feature film ever to have been shot entirely in Saudi Arabia – and by a female director at that.

That ten-year-old Wadjda (Waad Mohammed) is something of a rebel is established when we glimpse the jeans and baseball boots she wears underneath her abaya. She also listens to western pop music on the radio, hangs out with a boy, Abdullah, and has her own small business selling plaited friendship bracelets to her schoolmates. When Abdullah crows about having a bicycle, Wadjda is inspired to step up her moneymaking activities in order to buy one for herself. As in De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1948), a bike symbolises freedom, with potency added here by the fact that the riding of one by a woman is widely frowned on.

The limitations and humiliations conferred by her sex confront Wadjda everywhere she turns, from the building-site worker who sexually harasses her to a family tree on the wall of her home that lists only males. Wadjda is astute enough to realise that she can bypass social or religious approval if she's financially independent – but, when she endeavours to sell her bracelets to a market trader, she quickly learns that she'll always be undercut by bulk product imported from China. For Wadjda's mother – less entrepreneurial, more traditional, and as in love with and subservient to her elusive husband as her society could wish – the consequences of patriarchal dominance are yet more fraught and contradictory. She loses one job when her driver lets her down, in a country that doesn't allow women to drive themselves, and the possibility of another when she declines to associate with men unveiled. Her cherished marriage, meanwhile, is thrown off course by genetic happenstance: her failure to produce a male heir.

Wadjda, in the midst of all this, is a bit of a wish-fulfilment figure: a tomboy superheroine who gives pleasurable vent to the audience's frustration when she answers back to bullies and makes rakish little gestures of defiance. Here, the film rather seeks to have its cake and eat it too (though one could more kindly judge that it's just optimistic). For political reasons, it needs to show Wadjda as cowed and oppressed; yet for feelgood reasons it wants to show her as indefatigable. Wadjda also has a bit of a tendency to deploy the very tactics of her enemies in resisting them – confronting her pious teacher with a rumoured sexual indiscretion to show her up; threatening her mother's unreliable driver with deportation via Abdullah's politically connected relatives. This too can be interpreted in two ways: as a flaw in the film's moral logic,

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Emmanuel Gétaz
Frédéric Corvez
Clément Duboin
Written by
Emmanuel Gétaz
Pierre-Yves
Borgeaud
From an original idea
by Emmanuel Gétaz
Director of
Photography
Camille Cottagnoud
Editor
Daniel Gibel
Sound
Carlo Thoss
Vincente Pipponnier

©Dreampixies,
Urban Factory,
RTS, Momentum
Production
Production

Companies
Dreampixies and
Urban Factory
present in co-
production with RTS
- Radio Télévision
Suisse, SRG
SSR, Momentum
Production
With the participation
of Arte G.E.I.E.
and Orange
Cinéma Series
With the support of
Office Fédéral de la
Culture DFI, Fonds
REGIO Films avec la
Loterie Romande,
Fonds culturel de
Suisse, Succès
Passage Antenne,
Succès Cinéma
Fondation Vaudoise
pour le Cinéma,

Ford Foundation,
Sandoz - Fondation
de Famille, Fondation
Casino Barrière
de Montreux,
Development
funding from
WorldView
Executive Producer
Emmanuel Gétaz

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Soda Pictures

Swiss theatrical title
**Viramundo Un
voyage musical
avec Gilberto Gil**

A documentary following Brazilian musician and former culture minister Gilberto Gil as he travels from Brazil to Australia and South Africa, meeting and playing music with indigenous peoples of each country as he goes.

We Steal Secrets The Story of WikiLeaks

USA 2013, Director: Alex Gibney, Certificate 15 130m 5s

Reviewed by Paul Fairclough

The title of documentarist Alex Gibney's straight-up guide to the phenomenon of WikiLeaks and its still-uncertain and complex implications could have been the organisation's motto. In fact, "we steal secrets" is how a former CIA director interviewed in the film describes the work of the United States' foremost spooks: its appropriation points to a directorial understanding of the confusion and contradictions of a many-sided war being fought across a battlefield yet to be mapped.

Gibney is never more at home than when confronting audience assumptions about the subjects of his work, as he did with *Taxi to the Dark Side* (2007), while nailing a zeitgeist moment straight from the horse's mouth as in his most satisfying film to date, the jaw-dropping dissection *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room* (2005). In *Secrets*, he takes the WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange as a jumping-off point to examine the growth of 'hacktivism', following Assange's career from his roots in Australia as an ash-blond Matthew Broderick playing out *WarGames* in real life to his current less cinematic role wearing out the carpet of London's Ecuadorian embassy.

Around Assange's sudden rise and unsurprisingly serendipitous – for his many enemies – fall, *Secrets* gradually uncovers his various satellites, from broadsheet journalists and fellow hackers to Bradley Manning, the US Army private charged with providing WikiLeaks with some of its most devastating files. And therein lies a weakness in the film: Assange is in some ways the least interesting story in his own tale. The time Gibney devotes to Manning is by far the most fascinating section, and provides the first clear and detailed breakdown of just how the young soldier ended up on trial.

Manning's story also introduces Adrian Lamo, a hacker and security consultant who was Manning's trusted online confidant until he handed the whistleblower over to the US security services. Lamo is a character so bizarre, troubled and controversial that he warrants a film all of his own. Similarly, the relationship between Assange and the journalists at the *Guardian* and the *New York Times* – whose publishing of Manning's information had such a huge impact – is outlined only as part of a wider narrative about how WikiLeaks exploded on to the news scene. What is tantalisingly touched on is the sudden breakdown of Assange's relationship with those news organizations, and how it seemed to herald the start of Assange's troubles, though the exact circumstances are left largely unexamined in favour of a long inquest into his alleged vanity and the accusations of sex offences while on a speaking tour of Sweden. Again, the more interesting story here – one that many observers at the time found baffling – is precisely that rupture between Assange and his erstwhile champions in the liberal press.

The problem for Gibney is that these characters and their stories only make sense when Assange binds them together, and his is a tale that's been told countless times during the past couple of years. With nothing new from the man himself, the film feels like a summation, albeit a strikingly edited and intelligently nuanced one. The director and his executive producer Jemima



The girl with a bike: Waad Mohammed

or as an observation on how readily children learn from the examples that are set for them.

A final slight rub comes from the fact that the film rewards Wadja's unconventionality with conventional satisfactions: winning her bicycle money by outdoing her classmates at Koran recitation, and receiving – with a coy simper – Abdullah's shy declaration that he'd like to marry her when they're older. The latter is an odd moment. On one level, it's just cute. But it's also saddening, in that it lodges the easy friendship between Abdullah and Wadja within the system of ownership and

capitulation that so annoys her. Worse, it risks coyly reassuring us that our difficult heroine is still marriageable, like a spunky Disney princess.

These are little flaws, however, in the fabric of a first-time feature that doesn't falter in achieving its main goal: to make clear certain realities of female life experience in Saudi Arabia while also proffering comfort in the form of the hope of a fairer future. Its most receptive audience might be among schoolchildren, although certain elements of Saudi custom that are rushed over in the film (such as the prohibition against women driving) would have to be explained. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Roman Paul
Gerhard Meixner

Written by

Haifaa al Mansour

Director of

Photography
Lutz Reitelmeier

Editor

Andreas Wodraschke

Production Designer

Thomas Molt

Composer

Max Richter

Recording Mixer

Marc Meusinger

Costume Designer

Peter Pohl

©Razor Film

Produktion GmbH,

High Look Group,

Rotana Studios

Production Companies

Razor Film in

co-production with

High Look Group

and Rotana Studios

In co-operation

with Norddeutscher

Rundfunk and

Bayerischer Rundfunk

With the support of

Filmförderungs-

stalt, Mitteldeutsche

Medienförderung,

Berlin-Brandenburg,

Investitionsbank des

Landes Brandenburg,

Sundance Institute

Feature Film

Program, Doris

Duke Foundation

for Islamic Art

Produced in

co-operation with

Dubai Entertainment

and Media

Organization, Enjaaz

Developed with the

support of Ravi

Screenwriters

Lab, Abu Dhabi

Film Commission,

Hubert Bals Fund

Executive Producers

Hala Sarhan

Christian Granderath

Bettina Ricklefs

Rena Ronson

Louise Nemschoff

Cast

Reem Abdullah

mother

Abdullahrahman

Algothani

Abdullah

Waad Mohammed

Wadja

Ahd

Ms Hussa

Sultan Al Assaf

father

Alanoud Sajini

Fatin

Rafa Al Sanea

Fatima

Dana Abdullilah

Salma

Rehab Ahmed

Noura

Nouf Saad

Koran teacher

Noura Faisal

Abeer

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor



Soda Pictures

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, the present. Ten-year-old Wadja lives with her mother and sees little of her father, who is considering taking another wife because Wadja's mother hasn't borne him a son. At school, Wadja clashes with her strict and devout teacher Ms Hussa because she allows her head to go uncovered and her voice to be heard by men. Wadja's friend Abdullah shows off his bike to her, and she sets her heart on getting one of her own. She sells bracelets in school, and earns money passing notes between older girl Abeer and her boyfriend. Abeer is caught and disgraced; Ms Hussa suspects Wadja's involvement. An opportunity for Wadja to swell her coffers arises when the school announces a Koran recitation competition with a cash prize. Wadja's mother is

prevented from getting to work when her driver lets her down; Abdullah and Wadja track him down and threaten to report him for visa violation if he doesn't return. At school, two girls are suspected of having an overly close friendship; Wadja covers for them, but they are disciplined in front of the whole school. Wadja wins the contest and declares that she will spend the prize money on a bike, but Ms Hussa tells her that the school will send it to Palestine on her behalf. At home, Wadja's mother grieves: her husband has married again and the party at her mother-in-law's home is audible from across the street. She gives Wadja the bike of her dreams, bought with money from the return of a dress she had purchased to impress her man. Wadja races Abdullah, and wins.



Out with it: Julian Assange

 Khan – who posted bail for Assange – tried without success to persuade the WikiLeaks founder to grant an interview without editorial approval, but in the end negotiations broke down. Manning, in a military prison, was clearly beyond their reach. Gibney is too creative and determined a filmmaker to be put off by such troubles and often manages to sidestep a situation that could have hamstrung the project. But the film misses the input of the two figures, Assange in particular, who continue to carry the story forward, dragging in their wake all the talking heads stringing the narrative together here. The result is a digital-age *The Third Man* in which Harry Lime never steps out of the shadows. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Marc Shmuger Alex Gibney Alexis Bloom Written by Alex Gibney Director of Photography Maryse Alberti Editor Andy Grieve Original Music Will Bates Location Sound David Hocs	©WL Productions Production Companies A Jigsaw/Global Produce production An Alex Gibney film Executive Producers Blair Foster Jemima Khan Film Extracts <i>Hackers</i> (1995) <i>Wargames</i> (1983) In Colour [1.85:1]	pDistributor Universal Pictures International UK & Eire 11,707 ft +8 frames
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A documentary about the internet whistleblowing site WikiLeaks, charting how editor-in-chief Julian Assange became a computer hacker in Melbourne during the late 1980s and went on to develop a method for leaking secret files online with complete protection for the source. With input from Assange's former colleagues, other hackers, security-service officials and journalists, the film shows how WikiLeaks exposed abuses and failings by governments, particularly the US government, and allegedly attracted the attention of US Army private Bradley Manning, who was arrested on suspicion of leaking large amounts of classified data to the site. The film looks at the sexual-assault allegations made against Assange, and considers the wider implications of the internet for freedom and surveillance.

World War Z

USA/Malta 2013
Director: Marc Forster
Certificate 15 115m 50s

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

Zombies, in the apparently extensive philosophical discourse on the living dead, have been used to play with the idea that human behaviour can be explained in purely physical terms. Philosophical zombies are just like us, only without consciousness; or, if we assume that the mind is an epiphenomenon of the brain, they parody our pretensions to consciousness. The zombies of *World War Z*, on the other hand, might as well be flying piranha fish with better hearing. They conquer the globe in a morning, but when their grizzly work is done they enter a dormant state. Unlike philosophical zombies, they can't talk, don't seem to reproduce, and unless Marc Forster's film is granted the sequel it rather presumptuously sets up, one may assume that they will die of thirst, starvation or exposure.


No one in the film can count on that, and it falls to reluctant hero Gerry Lane (Brad Pitt), a UN war-crimes investigator turned house-husband, to find the chink in the brain-eaters' armour. Airlifted by his former boss from the ruins of New Jersey to an aircraft carrier in the Atlantic, Lane flies around the world picking up clues, eventually coming to the realisation – more by intuition than deduction – that the zombies ignore the fatally ill. The film ends with the world's surviving human population infecting itself with meningitis, while Pitt's voiceover – conceivably as producer rather than as star – admits that this is clearly a placeholder conclusion, and that there are still lots and lots of really interesting plot points to clear up, like the origin of the disease, the very thing his character was meant to discover. If only there had been time.

This non-ending is exactly what one has come to expect from Damon Lindelof, showrunner of TV's *Lost*, who was brought in to rescue the film



The tree of strife: Brad Pitt

when it was found to lack a satisfactory 'third act'. The last half-hour or so now consists of an inordinately long hide-and-seek sequence in a Welsh medical research lab, but at no point does the film really cohere as an intelligible narrative, nor indeed divide into 'acts'. Pitt's character, during his perilous round-the-world trip, receives the occasional bit of exposition from the people he meets, but the most important of these could easily have been relayed by radio. Thus he learns in passing from an isolated squad of American soldiers in South Korea that Israel has entirely survived the zombie attack – something that has apparently escaped the notice of the UN and what remains of the US military's high command. He is apparently the only person anywhere to notice the zombies' weak spot.

The reason for Israel's survival is an incredibly crass allegory that's seemingly meant to be taken as a sophisticated one. In this way *World War Z* resembles not, as its makers seem to desire, a Roland Emmerich film with a mind, but instead the parodic philosophical zombie alternative, an automaton that only thinks it is thoughtful. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Brad Pitt Dede Gardner Jeremy Kleiner Ian Bryce Screenplay Matthew Michael Carnahan Drew Goddard Damon Lindelof Screen Story Mayes C. Rubeo Visual Effects MPC Cinesite Ltd. Stunt Co-ordinators Simon Crane Wade Eastwood ©Paramount Pictures	Edited by Roger Barton Matt Chesse Production Designer Nigel Phelps Music Marco Beltrami Sound Mixer Stuart Wilson Costume Designer Mayes C. Rubeo Visual Effects MPC Cinesite Ltd. Stunt Co-ordinators Simon Crane Wade Eastwood ©Paramount Pictures	Corporation and GK Films, LLC Production Companies Paramount Pictures and Skydance Productions present in association with Hemisphere Media Capital and GK Films a Plan B Entertainment/2Dux ² production A Marc Forster film Produced with the support of the financial incentives provided by the Government of Malta	Executive Producers Marc Forster Brad Simpson David Ellison Dana Goldberg Paul Schwake Graham King Tim Headington Cast Brad Pitt Gerry Lane Mireille Enos Karin Lane Daniella Kertesz Segen James Badge Dale Captain Speke	David Morse ex-CIA agent Fana Mokoena Thierry Umutoni David Andrews naval commander Sterling Jerins Constance Lane Abigail Hargrove Rachel Lane Peter Capaldi Pierfrancesco Favino World Health Organization doctors Ludi Boeken Jurgen Warmbrunn Gregory Fitoussi C130 pilot	Dolby Surround 7.1/Datasat In Colour [2.35:1] Some screenings presented in 3D Distributor Paramount Pictures UK 10,425 ft +0 frames
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The present. The world is being rapidly overrun by zombies and millions are dying. Former UN investigator Gerry Lane and his family, having narrowly avoided death in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, are rescued by helicopter and taken to the US fleet in the Atlantic. Gerry is assigned by deputy secretary general Thierry Umutoni to escort a virologist to a US base in South Korea, where the plague was first reported. The virologist dies almost immediately after landing, but Gerry finds a few clues about the nature of the sickness, and learns that North Korea and Israel have escaped it, the latter by surrounding itself with a high wall.

Gerry flies to Jerusalem, where a Mossad commander explains that Israel was well prepared because it took seriously early reports of zombies

from India. During Gerry's visit the zombies scale the wall and unleash havoc. Gerry escapes on a passenger jet. While on board he pieces together a theory about how to combat the plague and persuades the pilot to fly to the nearest World Health Organization centre, in Cardiff. There Gerry tells the resident scientists that he has seen people escape the zombies' attention, and thinks that they were probably fatally ill. The scientists guide him through a zombie-occupied part of the building to collect samples of deadly diseases. Gerry infects himself with meningitis and is thereafter ignored by the zombies. The scientists make a vaccine, which is dropped by parachute to the remaining pockets of humanity. Gerry returns to the fleet and his family.



UNDERGROUND

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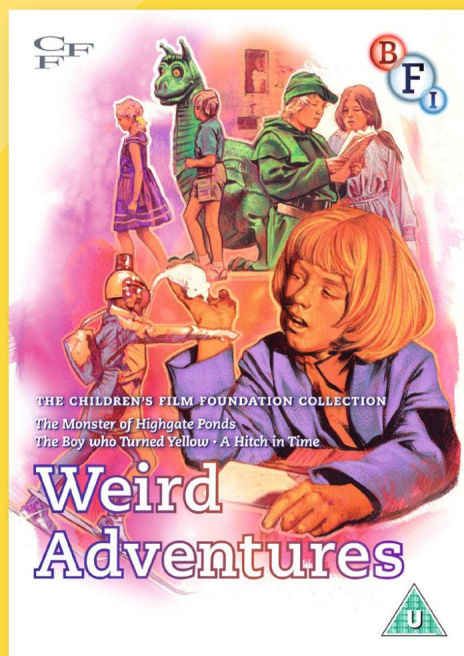
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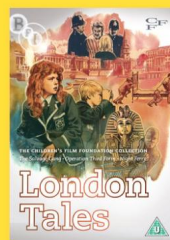
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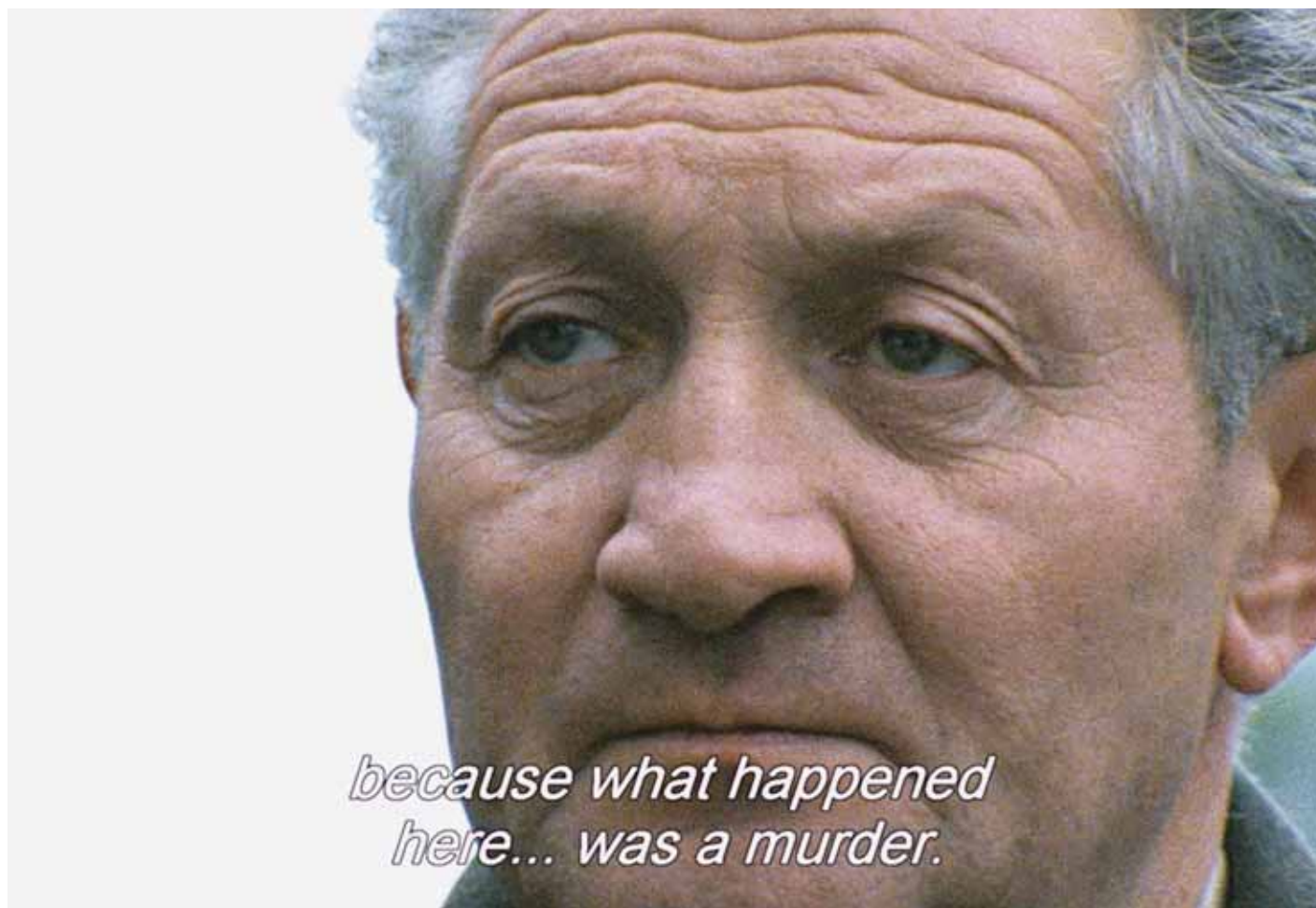
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Home cinema



Facing the past: Holocaust survivor Simon Srebnik revisits Treblinka, in Claude Lanzmann's nine-and-a-half-hour documentary *Shoah*

THE UNIMAGINABLE IMAGINED

Claude Lanzmann's essential documentary *Shoah* is a radical creation that defies being discussed in the same terms as other cinema

SHOAH

SHOAH/A VISITOR FROM THE LIVING/SOBIBOR, OCTOBER 14, 1943, 4PM/THE KARSKI REPORT

Claude Lanzmann, France 1985/1999/2001/2010; Criterion/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; Certificate PG; 566/68/102/49 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1; Features: Claude Lanzmann in conversation with Serge Toubiana, 2003 interview with Lanzmann about 'A Visitor from the Living' and 'Sobibór', interview with Caroline Champetier, assistant camera person on 'Shoah', and Arnaud Desplechin, trailer, illustrated booklet

Reviewed by Graham Fuller

One of the obscene truths that emerges from Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, a bottomless pit of revelations about the terror, degradation, torture and slaughter the Nazis dealt the Jews during the Holocaust, is that the victims had to pay for their deaths. It is disclosed in Lanzmann's interview

with Raul Hilberg, author of *The Destruction of the European Jews* (1961), a formative influence on the film. "This was a self-financing principle," Hilberg says. "The SS or the military would confiscate Jewish property and with the proceeds, especially from bank deposits, would pay for transports."

The issue of property comes up, too, when Abraham Bomba, who survived his ordeal as a barber of women with moments to live at Treblinka, describes parched Jews waiting in a transport at the station outside the camp. Twenty-four hours without water, they bartered their diamonds with SS guards in exchange for it – but never received a drop. Vacated Jewish homes were also casually stolen. When Lanzmann, the onscreen interlocutor, speaks to Poles in the towns of Auschwitz and Grabow, it becomes clear that they live without qualms in the homes they 'inherited' from transported Jews. Poles in Grabow and Chelmno demonstrate their anti-Semitism by remarking on Jews having owned gold and "some handsome candelabra".

Against the misery suffered in the ghettos, and given the barbarity of the camps, the loss of

property may seem insignificant. It has minute value when contextualised by the haunting words that Auschwitz survivor Filip Müller says to Lanzmann about "the infinite value of human life" and his conviction that "hope lingers in man as long as he lives". Yet robbing the Jews was a significant stage in the Nazis' programme of divesting them of humanity. Michael Verhoeven's 2008 *Human Failure* documented how German tax officials, prior to the deportations, planned the expropriation and 'Aryanisation' of Jewish assets, the beneficiaries being ordinary German citizens.

This is a preamble to saying how incongruous it feels to hold in one's hands the deluxe edition of *Shoah*, which Criterion has released on the 28th anniversary of Lanzmann's epochal nine-and-a-half-hour film. Containing six DVDs or three Blu-ray discs, the package is a problematic cultural artefact, not least because of its aesthetic beauty, which owes greatly to its reproduction of uncaptioned screen shots from the film. On the cover is not the often-seen view of the rail approach to Auschwitz-Birkenau's main entrance (reproduced in the booklet), but a ghostly image

of a smoke cloud left in a forest by Lanzmann's hired locomotive as it heads to Treblinka. On the front of the inner box is a blown-up frame, reminiscent of the image used on the film's original poster, of the wizened Polish transport driver Henrik Gawkowski peering back from his locomotive cab to visualise his doomed passengers of 35 years earlier; just out of focus, the 'TREBLINKA' sign stands below and in front of him. A double-panelled panoramic vista of the Sobibór forest, in which escaped Jews were sometimes killed by landmines and over which Lanzmann's camera glides sepulchraly in the film, adjoins the Gawkowski image.

The cover of the booklet, which contains essays by Lanzmann and the critic Kent Jones, is a long-shot of Simon Srebnik, the one-time Chelmno boy singer whom Lanzmann brought back to the camp from Israel, walking on the levelled wall that is all that remains of the crematoria which incinerated Jews killed in gas vans. The booklet doubles as a picture album of more than 150 small frames showing locomotives, graves, monuments, camp buildings and every participant in the film – the Jewish survivors, their Nazi persecutors, Polish railwaymen and villagers, and others such as Hilberg and the Nazi schoolteacher's wife Mrs. Michelson, who cannot recall whether "400,000 or 40,000" Jews perished in her adopted town of Chelmno. (When Lanzmann tells her it was 400,000, she says she "knew it had a four in it. Sad, sad, sad!")

In distilling Lanzmann's film, the box-set thus adds an extra level of mournful memorialisation to the *Shoah* experience. The discreet presentation enhances the roaming camera's observation of what Lanzmann calls the "non-sites" of the camps and of the death-haunted rail tracks, roads and forests, the eerie emptiness of the terrain being as crucial to his methodology of triggering the viewer's visual imagination as the memories shared by his interviewees.

It is unsettling, though, that these memories should be so handsomely encased when they include recollections of Jewish women "letting go" when they realised they were about to be gassed (that detail provided by the abhorrent former Treblinka SS officer Franz Schomel), of the trampled skulls of children found in gas chambers, of the living who were thrown into furnaces, of piled corpses that had been left to putrefy or those that were found flattened when they were disinterred (as the Nazis sought to cover up their atrocities) and crumbled when handled by members of the Jewish work details.

Another paradox of this distillation into cardboard, ink and polycarbonate plastic is that it should somehow contain the tears of Bomba, Müller and Mordechai Podchlebnik, Srebnik's fellow survivor from Chelmno, who unloaded his asphyxiated wife and children from a gas van but was denied the right to be shot by the guards. Not to put too fine a point on it, there's a profound philosophical disconnect in the notion of a modern optical storage medium accessing the industrialised and bureaucratised slaughter of six million Jews and the unborn offspring of the three generations that would



Looking back: Henrik Gawkowski

have so far followed them. If the Holocaust was the most incomprehensible event in history, and Lanzmann's representation of "the presence of an absence" – to quote Emil Fackenheim's phrase for the massacred Jews – an implausible undertaking, then it follows that the retail dissemination of *Shoah* should be equally based in illogic. It should be taken as read, however, that it is the most important DVD/Blu-ray that any individual or educational establishment can own. *Shoah* is not only the most exact and trenchant film made to evoke the Nazis' annihilation of the Jews but, in its use of illusion to conjure reality from a void (or, at least, from "traces of traces", as Lanzmann puts it), a radical creation that defies being written or talked about in the same terms as other cinema.

Shoah's timelessness, owing to its circular, achronological structure, refuses its categorisation as a historical documentary. By the time Lanzmann presents his concluding interviews about the conditions and uprising at the Warsaw Ghetto, for example, it is already known that the Warsaw Jews had been transported: time collapses, leaving the impression, as Lanzmann intended, that what happened in that hell is still happening. In getting the survivors to re-experience the emotions they felt *in situ* rather than simply reminisce, meanwhile, Lanzmann brings the viewer, as a witness, into the cattle cars, on to the ramps, the funnels where naked victims were whipped and bludgeoned as they ran to their deaths, into the gas chambers, into the crematoria, or amid the miasma where unburned corpses were piled. It's little wonder that, unaided by pre- and post-extermination archive footage and photographs, Lanzmann's reconstruction leads viewers, echoing some of the participants, to proclaim over and over again that the Holocaust was "unfathomable", "unspeakable" and "impossible". No matter what format it appears in as long as it appears whole, *Shoah* is an irreducible rendering of the irreducible catastrophe – the unimaginable imagined. As Lanzmann wrote: "The Holocaust is unique because it created a circle of flame around

Lanzmann brings the viewer, as a witness, into the cattle cars, on to the ramps, into the gas chambers, into the crematoria

itself, a boundary not to be crossed, since horror in the absolute degree cannot be communicated."

As well as *Shoah*, which has been digitally restored from the original 16mm camera negative, the Criterion package includes three more films that Lanzmann culled from the 350 hours of footage he shot between 1977 and 1981. *A Visitor from the Living* comprises an interview with Dr Maurice Rossel, a Swiss member of the International Red Cross team who inspected the Theresienstadt concentration camp in Czechoslovakia in 1944. Having failed to recognise that Auschwitz was a death camp the year before, Rossel was fooled by the Nazis' cosmetic make-over of Theresienstadt as a 'Potemkin ghetto', his subsequent report praising it not only as a normal village self-administered by the Jews but also as a final destination. Of the 144,000 Jews sent to the camp, it is believed that 33,000 died there and 88,000 in Auschwitz, Treblinka and elsewhere. Lanzmann's citing of facts gradually lacerates Rossel's wilful self-deception, exposing him as a dupe with anti-Semitic tendencies.

Sobibór, October 14, 1943, 4pm depicts the uprising at the camp, which represents in Lanzmann's words the "reappropriation of power and violence by the Jews". It focuses on an interview with Yehuda Lerner, an escapee of eight camps in six months who became one of approximately 50 survivors of the 300 prisoners who managed to break out of Sobibór. Lanzmann's questioning prompts Lerner to describe meticulously how he helped axe two Nazi guards to death, which occasioned him joy. Lanzmann is not interested in making a hero of Lerner or learning of his subsequent "adventure of freedom" but in his and his comrades' need to kill, or die in the attempt, rather than be "led to the gas chambers". They lived, after all, as Lerner confirms to Lanzmann, in a place where flocks of geese were raised because their honks would drown the screams of humans about to be gassed.

Towards the end of *Shoah*, Lanzmann incorporates footage from the first day of his two-day interview with Jan Karski, the former courier for the Polish underground and the exiled Polish government. Karski sombrely describes the mission he accepted from Jewish leaders in 1942 to report on the unprecedented plight of the Jews to Allied governments, and the unburied corpses and general squalor he saw when twice smuggled into the Warsaw Ghetto. On day two, footage from which Lanzmann reserved for his standalone film *The Karski Report*, Karski becomes animated detailing his meeting with President Roosevelt, who overawed him with his presence. But it was Karski's later talk with the Jewish Supreme Court judge Felix Frankfurter, a confidant of Roosevelt, that devastated him. "I do not believe you," Frankfurter said when Karski told of the Warsaw Ghetto and the Belzec concentration camp. Then, when the Polish ambassador remonstrated, "I did not say he is lying. I said that I do not believe him. There is a difference," Karski's courageous mission failed. Closing the gulf between *knowing* and *comprehending* is Lanzmann's own mission. **S**

New releases

CHRONICLE OF A SUMMER

Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch; France 1961; BFI/Region B/2 Blu-ray and DVD Dual Format; Certificate 12; 90 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1; Features: 'Un été + 50' (documentary on the film's production by Florence Dauman), Jean Rouch at the NFT (audio recording of 1978 lecture), essay booklet

Reviewed by Kate Stables

The film where "cinema gained the power to sneak into reality", as Raymond Bellour says of this cornerstone of *cinéma vérité*, sprang from the pairing of Jean Rouch's ethnographic filmmaking and sociologist Edgar Morin's restless curiosity, using the new handheld cameras and portable sound equipment to investigate the lives of a selection of Parisians with a novel informality. Relentlessly self-interrogating (one of the film's best scenes shows a screening where its participants tear into it mercilessly), it's composed of a jagged but seductive mix of confessional interviews and brazenly rigged group encounters, as Morin throws together students with workers, black immigrants with curious whites, in order to strike sparks. Freewheeling around its interviewees, it's every bit a New Wave documentary, whose young, passionately political participants demonstrate a restlessness that heralds May '68.

Where Chris Marker and Pierre Lhomme's similarly observational *Le joli mai* would spread a wider net, much of the film's power comes from the decision to dig deeply into its small central group. Despite a predictable interest in women's emotional lives (see secretary Mary-Lou's Oscar-worthy performance of romantic deprivation, where the camera hangs on her photogenic, fashionably existential misery), the film harvests some astonishing moments. When concentration-camp survivor Marceline paces the Place de la Concorde, recounting her Holocaust experiences to the dead father who was transported from Paris with her, the film takes an audacious, unexpected leap into her harrowing testimony. Arrestingly intimate, this scene owes a lot of its power (as does the day-in-the-life sequence of Angelo the dissatisfied Renault worker) to the fluid, atmospheric cinematography of Michel Brault.

Florence Dauman's excellent 2011 documentary *Un été + 50* is a revelatory companion piece to a work that dubbed itself "a new experiment in film-truth". Dauman reveals the extent of the filmmakers' self-censorship, which axed inflammatory discussion of the Algerian War and omitted disaffected student Jean-Pierre's past as a pro-FLN activist. Morin himself admits disarmingly that he'd hoped the film would lead to complete mutual understanding: "It failed. But it succeeded in showing how hard it is to understand one another, a fundamental human question."

Disc: Brault was consulted for the Cineteca di Bologna restoration, so the transfer feels well balanced, its streets and student garrets authentically and moodily monochrome. Dauman's documentary is rather moving as the cast of elders reflect generously on their wilder, younger selves. The film's most famous secret also ends here, as Jacques Rivette, only present as a shoe-buffing silhouette in the film, is revealed as Mary-Lou's life-regenerating lover.

CLEOPATRA: 50TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

Joseph L. Mankiewicz; USA 1963; Fox/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 251 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.20:1; Features: commentaries by Chris Mankiewicz, Tom Mankiewicz, Martin Landau and Jack Brodsky, behind-the-scenes and other featurettes, footage from New York and Los Angeles premieres

Reviewed by Geoffrey Macnab

This is not only one of the most expensive films in cinema history (with a budget of well over \$300 million in today's currency) but also one of the most quixotic. It's a full-blown epic that's at its best by far in its most intimate moments. Joseph L. Mankiewicz, drafted in to direct after the first attempt at making the film at Pinewood with Rouben Mamoulian collapsed because of Elizabeth Taylor's illness, was writing the screenplay even as he was shooting. This was filmmaking on the hoof, and at times it is very arch indeed: the togas, the knobby knees, the self-conscious exoticism – these all drag matters down. Nonetheless, away from the bombast and ceremony, the screenplay is as sly and as barbed as you'd expect from the writer-director of *All About Eve* (1950). To Mankiewicz's credit, he doesn't seem intimidated by the writers who have preceded him (Shakespeare, George Bernard Shaw) and manages to find an idiom that isn't anachronistic.

We are so used to the idea that this is a Liz Taylor/Richard Burton movie that it comes as a surprise how little Burton features in the first half of the film, which focuses on Cleopatra's relationship with Caesar (Rex Harrison). Taylor, showing huge amounts of cleavage and wearing ever more outlandish costumes and headgear, is brattish and regal by turns. Harrison, best known for playing dapper and sardonic English charmers like Henry Higgins, brings an unexpected urgency and vulnerability to his role as the epileptic and self-obsessed Roman leader who falls so violently for Cleopatra. Both he and later Burton's Mark Antony end up kneeling in front of the Egyptian queen.

The gossip surrounding the scandalous love affair between Burton and Taylor blinds us to the intensity they bring to their roles. Both get the opportunity to rage and to indulge in prolonged bouts of self-pity – their winds and waters are certainly not sighs and tears. There is a grandeur to their performances that makes even the most elaborate set pieces seem pale by comparison.

Reflecting the circumstances in which it was made, this is a wildly uneven film, with



Nile style: Elizabeth Taylor in *Cleopatra*

longueurs and moments of preposterousness. If you can last the course, though, it is also ultimately a moving and insightful study of narcissistic and extremely self-destructive lovers.

Disc: The backstory of the making of *Cleopatra* has always come close to eclipsing the movie itself, and it's fitting that chaos seems to dog the project even now. This digitally restored version was actually released first on Blu-ray in the UK without any fanfare in January 2012 – a year too soon for the 50th anniversary. It was then chosen for Cannes Classics in May 2013, repackaged for DVD and theatrically revived. Mankiewicz always hoped to put it out as two separate movies, one on Caesar and one on Mark Antony. That idea was vetoed by Darryl Zanuck because Fox was desperate to capitalise on the scandal surrounding Taylor and Burton's affair (and Burton would hardly have featured in the first film). As an extra here makes clear, much of the additional material Mankiewicz shot now appears to have been lost for good... seemingly thrown away to save on storage costs. Archivists do raise the tantalising possibility that an eight-hour 'work' print may still be in existence in private collectors' hands. As for the footage that Mamoulian shot at Pinewood, little of that survives either. Mamoulian spent \$7 million and shot for 16 weeks but was only able to provide a few minutes of usable film.

The cut here, given a pristine digital restoration, runs at a little over four hours – longer than the three-hour version released in most cinemas in 1963 but still only a fraction of the magnum opus Mankiewicz was hoping to create.

DR WHO AND THE DALEKS/ DALEKS' INVASION EARTH 2150AD

Gordon Flemyng UK 1965/1966; StudioCanal/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate U; 79/81 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: interviews, stills galleries, documentaries

Reviewed by Kim Newman

In embracing the whole history of *Doctor Who*, the current BBC TV series has often looked to these widescreen cinema-release 1960s footnotes for inspiration, for example casting Bernard Cribbins as a regular, trundling in candy-coloured Daleks that evoke the big-screen designs, and having Murray Gold echo the busy, loud orchestral scores of Malcolm Lockyer and Bill McGuffie.

Producer/writer Milton Subotsky bought the rights to Terry Nation's first two serials for the television show and filleted them to feature length, concentrating on the marketable breakout monsters while undervaluing the protagonist and his time-space machine. Subotsky drops the hero's fugitive alien status (a comparatively minor element then) and assumes that Dr Who is his name. Star Peter Cushing – who ought to have been a great Doctor – gives a dithery, fussy-old-man performance that jars with the grimmer elements. Granddaughter Susan is reduced from squealing teen to intrepid child (Roberta Tovey), colourless new characters (Jennie Linden, Jill Curzon) barely register, and children's entertainers Roy Castle and Cribbins are yoked into the Tardis and whisked off in time and space to become unlikely action heroes.

Directed by Gordon Flemyng, these films remain engaging. The first has a war-ravaged

petrified forest and the Daleks' all-metal city, and rallies a tribe of Julian Clary lookalikes to resist the squawking fascist dustbins. The second is set in the blitzed ruins of London, where patrols of vinyl-clad zombies skirmish with a human resistance movement. Subotsky lacks Nation's ability to write for children without being patronising, but the production values and action sequences remain splendid – and the remains of more adult themes pop up as the Doctor has to stir the pacifists of Skaro to overthrow the Daleks, and an array of collaborators and black marketeers enable the alien overlords' conquest of Earth.

Disc: Gorgeous new Blu-ray transfers show off the fantastical, colourful, studio-bound world of *Dr Who and the Daleks* and the grimmer, more location-oriented *Daleks' Invasion Earth 2150 AD*; strings might have been discreetly removed from the impressive flying saucer. A substantial documentary (*Dalekmania*) is held over from DVD releases, while briefer featurettes concentrate on the restoration work.

FOXY BROWN

Jack Hill; USA 1974; Arrow Video/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; 92 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: audio commentary by writer-director Jack Hill, featurettes ('From Black and White to Blaxploitation', 'Back to Black' and 'A Not So Minor Influence'), original trailer, Jack Hill trailer reel, booklet, new Pam Grier interview conducted by Calum Waddell

Reviewed by David Jenkins

This was all set to be the follow-up to the hit 1973 Pam Grier vehicle *Coffy*, until financial prognosticators noticed that Blaxploitation sequels were proving to be box-office poison. Hastily rewritten by Tarantino-approved cheapjack artisan Jack Hill and filmed very quickly at a series of almost comedically bland LA locations (hotels, offices, street corners, a disused landing strip), 1974's *Foxy Brown* is every bit the product of its cynical and garbled inception. The film's subsequent popularity as a piece of gaudy kitsch perhaps explains why it has been placed on a jewelled pedestal by the great Arrow Films ahead of the vastly superior *Coffy*, receiving a sleeky 1080p HD restoration and packaged in a highly desirable SteelBook casing.

The usually mighty Grier sleepwalks through a rote compendium of girl fights, drug imbroglios, nip-slips and gang-style public castrations, in a film that comes across like a particularly hacky TV detective serial but with the sex and gore quotient duly ramped up. Grier's Foxy infiltrates a nefarious modelling agency lorded over by Kathryn Loder's perma-scowling queen bitch Miss Katherine, in an attempt to avenge the death of her undercover cop boyfriend (not, as Josiah Howard's accompanying booklet essay claims, her dope-peddling brother played by Antonio Fargas). The initial suggestion of female empowerment existing in the realms of both good and evil is swiftly quashed, as Katherine, despite her corporate largesse, is confined to a desk in a mostly ornamental role while her cadre of male goons are out in the field getting their hands dirty. Comic-book white oppressors arrive in the form of crooked judges and sweaty Southern grease-monkeys, making the racial politics come across as something of an afterthought. And if the film has any discernible message, it's that



Foxy Brown The usually mighty Pam Grier sleepwalks through a rote compendium of girl fights, drug imbroglios and gang-style public castrations

murder is a means to an end, while gross sexual humiliation is a solution for the long haul.

Disc: As usual with Arrow, this is an extremely plush set with no skimping on quality supplementary materials and package design. It's a very crisp and clean digital restoration, even though you can't help but think this kind of designed-for-the-fleapit exploitation would work just as well (or maybe even better) viewed from a beer-soaked print covered in blemishes and burn marks.

FILMS BY HAL HARTLEY

THE UNBELIEVABLE TRUTH

USA 1989; Artificial Eye/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; 90 minutes; Certificate 15; Aspect Ratio 1.78:1

SIMPLE MEN

USA 1992; Artificial Eye/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; 105 minutes; Certificate 15; Aspect Ratio 1.78:1

AMATEUR

USA 1994; Artificial Eye/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; 105 minutes; Certificate 15; Aspect Ratio 1.78:1

Reviewed by Philip Concannon

Before Quentin Tarantino and Kevin Smith stole the spotlight with their motor-mouthed characters and specific worldview, Hal Hartley was the director at the vanguard of the independent cinema movement with the most immediately recognisable style. Hartley's characters talk, act and think in a way that's unique to his pictures, delivering their comical and philosophical musings in a dry, affectless manner, and his plots – such as they are – are prone to wild detours and tonal shifts. There's something exhilarating about watching a film that creates its own world and plays resolutely

by its own rules, but such films often run the risk of appearing unbearably mannered.

This latest batch of films to be released by Artificial Eye provides an instructive summation of Hartley's strengths and weaknesses as a filmmaker. Hartley has an undeniable gift for dialogue, with wry and often hilarious lines littering his scripts – "The last time I took a drink, I got into a car crash and I killed a girl," "That's enough to drive you to drink," is one typically deadpan exchange from his debut *The Unbelievable Truth*, which is the shortest and most consistently entertaining of the three films here. It has an unpredictable energy, a series of amusing running gags, a disarming performance from Hartley discovery Adrienne Shelley and a cinematic look achieved on a meagre budget. *Simple Men* and *Amateur* both contain moments of brilliance – such as *Simple Men*'s Godard-inspired dance number – but those moments are less frequent and punctuated by tiresomely arch scenes. Hartley is sometimes guilty of burdening his characters with so many contradictory quirks (Isabelle Huppert's character in *Amateur* is a pornography-writing nun and a nymphomaniac virgin) that it keeps them all at an emotional distance.

Hartley's influence can be seen in the work of a wide variety of independent filmmakers who followed the trail he blazed, but he never achieved the visibility or success that others enjoyed, and perhaps it's easy to see why. His work is very much an acquired taste, the kind of singular, esoteric filmmaking that can inspire deep devotion or irritated bewilderment in viewers. In an interview recorded for



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Amateur, Hartley describes his filmmaking style like this: “Most of the time I’m conscientious about putting humour in when I realise I might be getting a little too brainy or full of myself. I like ideas, I like characters speaking ideas and referencing things, but I don’t want it to be self-indulgent.” How successful he has been in achieving this delicate balance is open to debate.

Disc: The films all look excellent, particularly the visually striking *Amateur* and *Simple Men*. Each is accompanied by interviews and behind-the-scenes footage from the time of the film’s release, but the more recently recorded interviews, in which Hartley and his actors (including the late Adrienne Shelley) reflect on their early work, are far more engaging.

HERE, THEN

Mao Mao; China 2012; Second Run/Region 0
DVD; Certificate 15; 94 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.78:1
anamorphic; Features: interview, booklet

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Debutant director Mao Mao’s Edinburgh prizewinner opens with a blurred image of a young woman’s bedroom and closes with equally ill-defined waves crashing on to a stretch of coastline. In these and similar shots, the depth of field amounts to only a few inches, the film’s disaffected young protagonists surveying this narrow focal plane (its location often not immediately apparent) as though their own frames of reference are similarly circumscribed. We’re firmly in ‘slow cinema’ territory here (the main title takes nearly 19 minutes to make an appearance), with superficial aesthetic nods to Jia Zhangke but far less engagement with the surrounding politics and sociology: Mao is more concerned with individual characters’ inner lives, especially those aspects that can’t be reached through conventional narrative and dialogue.

The action (such as it is) shifts from an unidentified rural district to high-rise Beijing with no discernible effect on its characters’ ability to relate to each other or their surroundings. Michelangelo Antonioni would understand where they’re coming from, but the sense of anonymity and insignificance seems peculiarly well suited to contemporary China. If the symbolism is occasionally clunky (a brief pause to admire a caged bird, an interrogation about ‘loss of identity’ that actually refers to a missing ID card), more often Mao contrives deceptively simple moments of unexpected power.

Xiao Bin (Wang Yizhen) is initially so spavined by ennui that he can’t even brush aside an inquisitive fly or react when giggling women sculpt breasts and a pyramidal phallus out of sand on to his torso. A diagonal shadow is cast on a bed, the composition only relaxing when Xiao Chao (Li Wensi) shifts into its lighter half. An energetic bout of copulation is halted so abruptly that it almost seems like a freeze frame, until we hear Lily (Li Ziqian) sobbing. Above all, there’s the already much celebrated mid-point shot in which Yangyang (Huang Tang Yijia) stops bopping her head to an offscreen pop song to stare directly at the camera for an unsettling length of time, as though quizzically interrogating us as to why we are so interested in her when her own sense of identity is so foggy.

Disc: The director-approved transfer is first-rate, as is the self-analytical video interview with Mao. Edinburgh programmer (and *S&S* contributor) Harriet Warman is on booklet-essay duties.

THE LONG RIDERS

Walter Hill; USA 1980; Second Sight/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 100 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1

Features: documentaries (‘Outlaw Brothers,’ ‘The Northfield Minnesota Raid: Anatomy of a Scene’ and ‘Slow Motion: Walter Hill on Sam Peckinpah’)

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

On more than one occasion Walter Hill has claimed that everything he’s made has essentially been a western, but this was his first unvarnished genre entry. If the shadow of former colleague Sam Peckinpah looms large over its slow-motion violence, its scab-picking obsession with betrayal, its revisionist probing of much-printed legends and the quasi ‘wild bunch’ formed by the James and Younger brothers, it offers many pleasures of its own. The casting of actual brothers as historical equivalents (Stacey and James Keach as Frank and Jesse James, David, Keith and Robert Carradine as Cole, Jim and Bob Younger, Dennis and Randy Quaid as Ed and Clell Miller, Christopher and Nicholas Guest as Charlie and Robert Ford) might have had an initial whiff of marketing gimmick but it works smashingly well in practice, while Ry Cooder made his debut as Hill’s soon-to-be-regular composer with a tobacco-stained folk-based score that’s as much a feat of musical archaeology as of performance.

Although the film is bookended by two bank robberies (the second and more elaborate of which offers a masterclass in kinetic choreography), Hill devotes much of the running time to fleshing out these men and granting them sometimes unexpected character

traits – he is at pains to stress the outlaws’ commitment to their families and their extensive farming experience, with Jesse James presented as a particularly moral character. Only a few years since the conclusion of the US Civil War, sharp lines are drawn between Confederate and Yankee, with the victorious North represented by Pinkerton’s men, who are far more indiscriminately violent, especially when they murder soft-target relatives instead of the James and Younger gang members themselves.

The acting standouts are David Carradine, who has rarely been this laconically compelling (a reminder that this hugely prolific actor rarely got a role as meaty as this), and James Keach, whose lack of star status elsewhere paradoxically makes his Jesse James doubly effective here – especially since his ultimate fate has long been preordained.

Disc: A very pleasing high-definition transfer makes the most of Ric Waite’s dusty cinematography, although four seconds of horse falls have been removed from this version for legal reasons. The US edition is uncut but lacks the extensive extras featured here, including Hill’s affectionate tribute to Peckinpah.

THE NAKED FACE

Bryan Forbes; USA 1984; HanseSound/Region B Blu-ray; 105 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1

Reviewed by Sergio Angelini

Andrew Sarris memorably snarked that the late Bryan Forbes “perpetually pursues the anti-cliché only to arrive at anticlimax”, but there is little evidence of dramatic diminuendo in this adroit if slow-moving whodunit. One of the better movies to emerge from the Cannon stable in the 1980s, it was derived from the debut novel by Sidney Sheldon, hitherto a purveyor of Hollywood musicals, comedies and



The Long Riders The shadow of Sam Peckinpah looms large over the slow-motion violence of Walter Hill’s film, but it offers many pleasures of its own

featherweight TV confections such as *I Dream of Jeannie* and later the *Thin Man* clone *Hart to Hart*.

In adapting it for the screen, Forbes – in what would prove to be his final foray into directing for the cinema – remained remarkably faithful to the source while thankfully expunging its more asinine elements (inter alia, in the book the shrink hero ‘cures’ homosexuality) and most of the tired red herrings too. What emerges instead is a sober, even dour portrait of a psychoanalyst (a subdued Roger Moore projecting brain power through very large specs) who, still in mourning several years after the death of his wife and child, must reassess his priorities when he apparently starts being stalked by one of his patients. He gets little help from the police, with Rod Steiger giving a particularly OTT performance as a hostile cop with a longstanding grudge against the doc, so instead he turns to Art Carney’s detective-for-hire. In a virtual reprise of his performance from *The Late Show* (1977), Carney steals the show as the ageing PI with a hearing aid, unexpected bomb-disposal skills and a passion for horology and feline company (shades of Peter Sellers in Forbes’s *The Wrong Box*). He exits the film much too soon but this remains, even within the narrow confines of the traditional mystery, a worthy example of Forbes’s unflashy, sensitive and unsentimental approach to moviemaking.

Disc: This barebones Blu-ray edition – for the moment Forbes’s only directorial outing available in HD – sports a very sharp transfer that ably retains David Gurfinkel’s low-key cinematography. Currently only available in Germany (as *Das nackte Gesicht*), it can be viewed either dubbed or in English without subtitles.

THE ONLY GAME IN TOWN

George Stevens; USA 1970; Twilight Time/Region-free Blu-ray; 113 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1;

Features: isolated music track, theatrical trailer

Reviewed by Peter Tonguette

Perhaps because of its Las Vegas locale, George Stevens’s *The Only Game in Town* improves as the stakes in its story are raised. Based on Frank D. Gilroy’s superb play, the film opens shakily with a meet cute between Joe Grady (Warren Beatty), an impetuous piano player, and Fran Walker (Elizabeth Taylor), a vulnerable chorus girl past her prime. Beatty looks bored by some of the barbs that Gilroy’s script requires him to enunciate. For one thing, Joe has the annoying habit of quoting both sides of a conversation: “Why don’t you come in?” “Don’t mind if I do.”

After Joe and Fran spend the night together in Fran’s dingy apartment, however, we realise that this is no routine romantic comedy. On waking, they almost pass for young marrieds, as she offers him his choice of orange or pineapple juice and he moans about her supply of razor blades. Before long, Joe moves in, and we fear any more familiarity between these two will breed contempt – yet it turns out they aren’t looking for excitement but solidity. Indeed, the most daring aspect of Stevens’s portrayal of Joe and Fran is that their relationship isn’t based on any sort of moony infatuation (though at one point Joe croons bars from ‘Some Enchanted Evening’ to Fran – an unlikely but touching moment). Instead, Fran offers motherly admonitions to



Lives in a landscape: *Here, Then*

Joe about his self-destructive gambling (he loses his savings at casinos more than once), while he recognises her care for him (a major episode concerns her hiding his money so that he doesn’t bet with it again), even though he admits he could attract interest from other women. Taylor has never seemed so poignantly middle-aged, far more authentically ‘discontent’ than in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* four years earlier.

In the end, Joe convinces Fran to marry him after a sleepless night in which both contemplate life without the other – here, Stevens and cinematographer Henri Decaë succeed in evoking Las Vegas with the awful early-morning light streaming through the windows. True to form, Joe remains utilitarian in his reasons for wanting to get hitched, one of them being the embarrassment it will avoid when they register at hotels.

Disc: A marvellous-looking transfer.

OPENING NIGHT

John Cassavetes; USA 1977; BFI/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 15; 144 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1 (DVD anamorphic);

Features: commentary, documentaries, booklet

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

“I seem to have lost the reality of the reality,” complains Gena Rowlands’s stage star Myrtle Gordon at one point in her ongoing tussle with both the demanding but unsympathetic part that she’s painstakingly constructing during rehearsals and out-of-town tryouts and post-traumatic stress following the death of an overly ardent fan in a shockingly sudden road accident. Lengthy extracts of the play-within-the-film, a menopause-themed domestic melodrama named *The Second Woman*, illustrate her dilemma, not least because its traditionalist author (Joan Blondell) can’t understand why she doesn’t just follow what she thinks is a perfectly adequate blueprint. (The extras reveal that Blondell had offscreen difficulties of her own with Cassavetes’s high-wire approach.)

Myrtle is squarely in line with Rowlands’s other major Cassavetes performances (*Faces*, *Minnie & Moskowitz*, *A Woman Under the Influence*), but

here the whole notion of what makes a great performance comes under forensic scrutiny – aided on screen and off by Cassavetes himself as Myrtle’s co-star Maurice. As a result, this feels simultaneously like classic Cassavetes and a complete one-off, with his customary attention to realism and emotional truth itself coming under the spotlight as Rowlands frequently appears to be psychoanalysing herself for real. It’s not quite postmodern as such, but quasi-fantastical moments that would stick out like the sorest thumb in his other films feel strangely apposite here.

To counterbalance this, Cassavetes’s direction is more sedate than usual, with Al Ruban’s camera frequently content merely to join the audience in the stalls or observe quietly from the sidelines, creating straightforwardly circumscribed spaces in which the actors can flourish. This is particularly true of the climactic scene, which is so dedicated to recreating a ‘live’ experience that it doesn’t even feature cutaways to close-ups of the actors on stage – and is all the more riveting for it.

Disc: Of all Cassavetes’s films, this benefits the most from a high-definition upgrade, if only because the many theatre sequences need as much detail as possible. Happily, the transfer is superb, as is the overall package, which offers plenty of anecdote and analysis.

PERFECT UNDERSTANDING

Cyril Gardner; UK 1933; Cohen Media Group/

Region-free Blu-ray; 85 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1;

Features: ‘Dream Stuff’, ‘Husbands’ Reunion’

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

As her once-thriving career as Hollywood’s reigning *grande dame* of silent-era infidelity dramedy faded for good in the early talkie years, Gloria Swanson decamped to London to make this curious last gasp, a swanky Brit version of the romantic-cross-purposes vehicles she used to make with Cecil B. DeMille, co-starring a virtually pubertal Laurence Olivier (he was 25) and co-scripted by none other than a 27-year-old Michael Powell.

It’s a lively if canned bit of domestic dramaturgy, opening with a posh evening party at someone’s mansion, in which Swanson and Olivier’s lovers repose and squabble about marriage (he’s eager, she’s doubtful) as married couples around them betray each other and battle in misery. One lovely sequence manifests the tension visually – Swanson’s fretting modern girl paces the veranda with amorous confidant John Halliday, vetting the pros and cons of matrimony, passing open doors and windows through which we see the other couples play out their ruinous dramas. Rowland V. Lee was the original director, replaced by the unexceptional Cyril Gardner at some point; we suspect this pungent switch was conceived and staged before the switch.

Of course, once married and sworn to what they think is a progressively un-conubial vow of honesty, our two puppyish protagonists transgress and misunderstand, and the situation spirals out of control, ending up in the High Court settling their muddled and suspicion-plagued divorce. An extended honeymoon montage is as explicit about sex as it could be without once showing the actors, but the perplexing



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and fascinating core of the film is Swanson herself, starring in only her fourth talkie. Alternately vampiric and vulnerable, beautiful in a glare-eyed way that can be discomfiting, reconfiguring her showy silent-film acting gestures as her character's attempts at light-hearted humour, Swanson is a very particular kind of movie creature, hard to empathise with but easy to worship. Seeing her here, still on the cusp between youth and middle age, beyond the iconic pantomime of Hollywood silents and long before the grotesque self-mummification of *Sunset Blvd.*, she is a vexing presence, completely unlike any other Hollywood star.

Disc: Though newly restored, the old source material is handicapped by murkiness and early-sound indistinction. The supplementary Walter Catlett comedy shorts are both tepid and politically incorrect.

PERE PORTABELLA – COMPLETE WORKS

Spain 1967-2009; Intermedio/Region-free DVD; 869 minutes total; various aspect ratios

Reviewed by Mar Diestro-Dópido

Eighty-four-year-old Pere Portabella is one of the most iconic figures in the history of Spanish cinema, yet the films he has directed remain relatively unknown and inaccessible beyond the circuits of specialist festivals and cinemathèques. The release of a box-set of Portabella's entire directorial oeuvre, 22 shorts and features, from *No contéis con los dedos* (*Don't Count on Your Fingers*, 1967) to *Uno de aquellos* (*One of Those*, 2009), by the excellent Spanish DVD company Intermedio, is a welcome and long-overdue corrective to this situation.

Portabella is probably better known as a producer than as a director – Carlos Saura's groundbreaking debut feature *The Hooligans* (1959), Luis Buñuel's 'scandalous' *Viridiana* (1961) and José Luis Guerín's homage to silent cinema *Train of Shadows* (1997) are just three of the highlights in a distinguished career. The films Portabella has directed are equally eclectic, ranging from horror to documentary to political cinema, but they share the same avant-garde preoccupations – the nature of cinema apparatus, the process of creativity, the boundaries of cinematographic language – and always feel fully engaged with the social and political context of their time.

In fact, Portabella has interspersed his film career with a profound commitment to politics; he was elected a senator in 1977, and was one of the writers of Spain's current Constitution. This political involvement naturally expresses itself in his films, most explicitly in *El sopar* (*The Supper*, 1974), clandestinely filmed a year before Franco's death, on the night that anarchist Salvador Puig Antich was executed, and in *Informe general* (1976), in which he asks pointed questions about Spain's transition from dictatorship to democracy by means of an interview-based documentary shot as a fiction film.

Portabella's films have also contained strong doses of surrealism – perhaps unsurprisingly given his close friendship with Buñuel – and a preoccupation with the horror lurking behind the polished surfaces of bourgeois existence and



One for the Stamp collection: *Theorem*

consumer culture, most provocatively in *Don't Count on Your Fingers*, in which the stagnation of both regime and society is mocked in a series of humorous sketches constructed like TV ads. But perhaps Portabella's most distinctive trait is his linkage of cinema with other forms of artistic expression: his collaboration with Spanish composer Carles Santos and poet Joan Brossa resulted in the cult *Vampir-Cuadecuc* (1970), a dissonant 'making of' look at Jesús Franco's *Count Dracula*, which deconstructed the myth of Dracula by challenging viewer expectations of the genre and its most representative figure, Christopher Lee. In the series of shorts made in collaboration with Joan Miró, Portabella asks the painter to create and then destroy his own work on camera. And in perhaps his most famous film, *The Silence Before Bach* (2007), Portabella resurrects the composer to expatiate on the past, the present, our relationship to art and even the European Community: a magnificent, poetic summation of Portabella's own concerns.

Viewing the films today feels like familiarising yourself with a director who has spent the past 50 years right at the heart of things, fearless in his formal and political radicalism but also, perhaps most importantly, one of the most lucid and humane witnesses to an often tormented period of Spanish history. Which is another way of saying that this box-set is pretty much indispensable.

Disc: The set comprises seven discs in superb transfers, with every film available with French and English subtitles. The only disappointment is the absence of extras.

A PORTRAIT OF JAMES DEAN – JOSHUA TREE, 1951

Matthew Mishory; USA 2012; Peccadillo Pictures/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15 (tbc); 92 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9; Features: 'Delphinium: A Childhood Portrait of Derek Jarman'

Reviewed by Alex Davidson

Matthew Mishory's sensuous snapshot from the life of James Dean (played by James Preston, a former model), capturing moments from the years before his career took off, takes his rumoured bisexuality as read. It imagines his passionate relationship with an unnamed roommate (based on screenwriter William Bast), his patronage (in exchange for sexual favours) by exec Rogers Brackett, and the odd fling with both men and women. We see his intense acting tuition at UCLA, and his complete commitment to fashioning an iconic status. Mishory also

depicts his trips to the Joshua Tree desert, where he was sent to tan up for his big break, whereupon Michael Marius Pessah's cinematography bursts from 35mm black-and-white to dazzling Super 8 colour accents. It is in the desert, insists the film, that Dean was able to be himself.

This is a queer film, in its content and its gaze – the camera lingers on male lips puckering around lime slices, buttocks bobbing in swimming pools, beautiful things doing beautiful nothing under the LA sun. The director magpies the aesthetics of New Queer Cinema, notably the black-and-white/colour contrasts of *Poison* and the lush shots of desert vistas of *My Own Private Idaho* (both 1991). He also borrows the movement's pretensions, opening in Arthur Rimbaud's study to draw parallels between the poet and the star. *Joshua Tree* refuses to be playful – there are no cheap references to Dean's later success or early death; instead it's a gorgeous, solemn portrait of a young man willing to compromise to meet his ambitions ("If they want me, they're gonna have to pay").

Disc: Peccadillo's release includes Mishory's lush and lyrical short *Delphinium: A Childhood Portrait of Derek Jarman*.

SPIDER BABY

Jack Hill; USA 1964; Arrow/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 15; 84 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1; Features: 'The Host' short film by Jack Hill (1960), audio commentary, documentaries, galleries, original trailer

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Filmed in 1964 but unreleased for legal reasons until 1968, Jack Hill's horror-comedy is a missing link between James Whale's *The Old Dark House* and Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. Chauffeur Bruno (Lon Chaney Jr) looks after the 'children' of his late employer, who suffer from a degenerative condition that involves a descent into infantile savagery. Ralph (Sid Haig) is a bald goon in a velvet Lord Fauntleroy suit, while Elizabeth (Beverly Washburn) and Virginia (Jill Banner) are demented nymphets who play vicious games of 'spider'. Enter a woodenly decent uncle (Quinn Redeker) and a magnificently scheming aunt (Carol Ohmart) who are after the family fortune... and an orgy of horrors ensues, including incest, cannibalism, mutants in the cellar, a severed ear in a matchbox and a climactic explosion. It has bizarre cheesecake, including Ohmart in elaborate underwear responding with insane enthusiasm after Ralph has molested her, and groundingly sincere work from Chaney (who 'sings' the astonishing theme song). The most memorable aspect is the teaming of weird sisters Washburn (who interrupts the comedy with a chilling shriek of murderous rage) and Banner (crawling like a spider with knives in both hands).

Disc: Arrow's handling of this title is outstanding, its dual-format package containing Blu-ray and DVD versions. Restoration of the film elements and a new transfer (great on DVD, revelatory on Blu-ray) deliver details of performance, art direction, makeup and monochrome cinematography that supersede previous grey-looking issues, making the film funnier, sexier, more transgressive and more disturbing. Copious extras include a commentary by Hill and Haig, alternate opening credits under the title *Cannibal Orgy*, and Hill's student short *The Host*.

TABU

FW. Murnau; USA 1931; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 85 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.19:1; Features: commentary, documentary, outtakes, short, booklet

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

A young woman sits up in bed, gazing in horror as the shadow of her doom falls across her. It could be the climax of FW. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) – but in fact it's the corresponding scene in his final film, *Tabu*. Parallels between his first masterpiece and his last abound. Once again we've got the Murnau eternal triangle – a man, a woman and Fate – and there are elements of Max Schreck's chilling vampire in the implacable stillness of old Hitu, the emissary who acts as agent of the eponymous taboo. No sooner have Matahi and Reri, two beautiful young Pacific islanders, fallen in love than the decree falls: Reri has been chosen as a sacred virgin, and death awaits any man who touches her.

The original plan for *Tabu* was a collaboration between Murnau and the great documentary pioneer Robert Flaherty, to be made on location far from Hollywood, which after three fraught productions Murnau had come to loathe. But the two men were temperamentally incompatible and Flaherty was ousted. The outcome was pure Murnau – ravishingly lovely in its play of light and shadow across lithe young bodies, hauntingly doom-laden as those shadows become bars of imprisonment. There are echoes here too of Murnau's first Hollywood movie *Sunrise* (1927): the contrast between the prelapsarian innocence of Bora Bora and the corruption of the white-dominated island to which the young couple flee recalls the earlier film's country/town dichotomy. Murnau died in a road accident a week before the premiere of *Tabu*, aged only 42.

Disc: Eureka's transfer – restored fully uncensored, as Murnau intended it – is all but flawless. Shot silent, the film is enriched by Hugo Riesendorf's lush, expressive original score.

THEOREM

Pier Paolo Pasolini; Italy 1968; BFI/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 15; 94 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: Terence Stamp interview, audio commentary, optional English-language soundtrack, booklet

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Reviewing the rereleased novel of *Theorem* in 1992, Gilbert Adair feared that its partner, that “seductive and faintly ludicrous” film, was in danger of being forgotten. While its doctrine of Eros-as-liberator may not have vanished completely (Exhibit A here would be 2009's swooning *I Am Love* – *Theorem* reimagined as a Sirkian melodrama), the film's uncompromising mid-60s intellectualism does indeed make Terence Stamp's beatific erotic progress through an haut-bourgeois Milan household doubly mysterious to today's viewer. Newcomers to Pasolini are thus recommended to avail themselves of Robert Gordon's insightful audio commentary, which unpacks the film's religious themes, Marxist theory and radical stylistic shifts with the careful attention befitting one of the high points of auteurist cinema.

Alongside the extraction of intricate layers of meaning from Pasolini's freighted frames, one can

enjoy the film's extraordinary beauty, the play of looks and desire almost obliterating the role of dialogue. Despite arousing the Vatican's ire, the transgressive sex scenes that dominate the film's first half are surprisingly chaste, as the sexual benedictions bestowed by Stamp's light-haloed Apollo figure crack open the family's brittle carapace. Neorealist icons Silvana Mangano and Massimo Girotti, cast out into sexual humiliation and abject disintegration respectively, create diverting inversions of their screen personas. But Laura Betti's unblinking ascent (literally) into rural sainthood as maid Emilia has a religious intensity that belies Pasolini's Marxism and crowns the film's schematic if richly symbolic spread of family fates gloriously.

Disc: A fine colour transfer, particularly on Blu-ray, where Girotti's sun-dappled early-morning walkabout is, appropriately enough, almost blinding. The most significant extra is a playful and lengthy interview with Stamp. His anecdotes may have a practised, chat-show ease, but he's pleasingly acute about the process of working with the uncommunicative Pasolini, and about the film's reception: “This was a very obscure movie. It was going to be seen by four drag queens and Einstein. But when the Pope came out against it, *everybody* wanted to see it.”

THE TOWN THAT DREADED SUNDOWN

Charles B. Pierce; USA 1977; Scream Factory/Region 1 Blu-ray; 86 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1; Features: audio commentary with Jim Presley, interview with Andrew Prine, Dawn Wells and James W. Roberson, theatrical trailer, essay by Brian Albright, poster, stills gallery, ‘The Evictors’ (1979)

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

The Town That Dreaded Sundown is set in the city of Texarkana, on the Texas and Arkansas border,

in the months after World War II. It sits on an aesthetic border as well, between the classic slasher and what we now call ‘reality horror’: there's a stalker POV but no handheld, though a newsreel-style announcer sets the scene.

Sundown's director and co-star, Arkansas's own Charles B. Pierce, had made his mark with *The Legend of Boggy Creek*, a 1972 docudrama about the ‘Fouke Monster’, a Bigfoot-like local legend. With this, his fifth feature, he again turned to the lore of his native country – in this instance the case of the ‘Phantom Killer’, who killed five and grievously injured three in Texarkana in the spring of 1946.

Ford and Peckinpah favourite Ben Johnson, playing ‘the Lone Wolf of the Texas Rangers’, comes to town to ferret out the at-large culprit, while, in the role of patrolman A.C. ‘Sparkplug’ Benson, Pierce himself provides cornpone comic relief. Jostling uncomfortably against torturous recreations of the killings (the trombone murder, the commentary assures us, is an invention), these interludes are only palatable if you accept the film for what it is: a piece of folk-art pulp, made with a combination of sophistication and naive intuition. The supporting cast of indigenous amateurs drummed up by Pierce further contribute to the rough, homespun feel, giving *Sundown* an element of verisimilitude and quasi-documentary truth. There's a sense that these same extras are the film's eventual drive-in audience, a feeling played up in the ambiguous conclusion – the modern-day Texarkana premiere of *The Town That Dreaded Sundown*!

The Evictors, another period horror made by Pierce for American International, is also included in Scream Factory's two-disc set. Set in Louisiana in the sere autumn of 1942, *Evictors* is elevated by the lead performance from Jessica Harper, a smart and unpredictable



Spider Baby Jack Hill's horror-comedy is a missing link between James Whale's *The Old Dark House* and Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*

New releases

actress who transcends mere scream-queen designation. But it is *Sundown* that belongs to posterity: a contemporary-set remake/sequel is in the offing; the makers of 1999's *The Blair Witch Project* acknowledge its influence; and *Sundown* is a relation to unsolved mystery true-crimeers such as Bong Joonho's *Memories of Murder* (2003) and David Fincher's *Zodiac* (2007). Like these esteemed titles, *Sundown* is as much a sociological study as a procedural – for in the absence of answers, absolutely everything takes on the sinister aspect of a clue. **Disc:** *Sundown* has never looked better, which isn't to say this Blu is perfect – there are some queer vacillations in lighting, particularly in the night scenes, though hard to say if source or transfer is to blame.

TWIXT

Francis Ford Coppola; USA 2011; Pathé/Region 0 Blu-ray; 89 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.00:1; Features: making-of, 2012 Paris preview with Coppola, trailer

Reviewed by David Thompson

Twixt is the third in a trilogy of self-financed and self-produced films that Coppola made after abandoning his long-nurtured *Megalopolis* project in the aftermath of 9/11 and vowing no longer to take on studio-based assignments. While *Youth Without Youth* (2007) and *Tetro* (2009) were shot in Romania and Argentina respectively, Coppola dropped his idea of filming next in Istanbul when he realised that the dollar was not so strong in Turkey after all. But after a night indulging in the local raki, the director had a dream which supplied the idea for a film that could be shot closer to home – in the Napa Valley in northern California.

In his dream, Coppola encountered an adolescent girl with strange teeth, who could be a vampire; visited a deserted hotel whose floor consisted of tombstones from which he saw children escaping to dance into the night; and then engaged in conversation with none other than Edgar Allan Poe. For his script, Coppola fed these same elements into the dreams of washed-up horror writer Hall Baltimore (Val Kilmer), on the road flogging his latest novel. Baltimore arrives in a small town dominated by a tower with seven clock faces, each giving a different time. In this eerie, somewhat Lynchian environment, the writer becomes embroiled in the local legend of a fanatical pastor who believed that the goths camped outside the town are in fact dangerous vampires.

What just about makes this fairly indigestible gothic stew palatable is a very controlled directorial style plus a droll performance from the now corpulent Kilmer. Coppola makes obvious connections with his Corman-produced 'B-movie' debut *Dementia 13* (1963) and the fantasy world of his *Dracula* (1992), as well as the mythology of the Motorcycle Boy in *Rumble Fish* (1983) – the latter being the film that *Twixt* arguably most resembles in its games with time and monochrome-with-colour-splashes photography. On an even more personal note, there is also the surprising allusion through the writer's guilt for his daughter's death by speedboat to Coppola's loss of his own son Gian-Carlo (whose daughter Gia worked on *Twixt* and provides the 'making



Transport of delight: *Underground*

of'). *Twixt* is therefore strictly one for fans of the director, who may nevertheless be relieved to hear that he has subsequently gone on record to say this is definitely the last of his 'student' films.

Disc: This French release features the original English soundtrack with non-removable French subtitles. The image is fine if clearly digital in origin, and though *Twixt* was released theatrically with two 3D sequences, this is a totally 2D version.

UNDERGROUND

Anthony Asquith; UK 1928; BFI/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate PG; 93 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: documentary shorts, restoration featurette, newsreel footage, booklet

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Anthony Asquith's decline into a purveyor of filmed plays and safe middlebrow entertainments (*The V.I.P.s*, *The Yellow Rolls-Royce*) seems all the sadder given the sparky originality of his early work. *Underground*, only his second movie (and his first as sole credited director), offers a lively cocktail of all the influences that were exciting him at the time – Hollywood melodrama, German expressionism and Soviet montage – fashioning from them something fresh and individual.

Fluently shifting in tone from the light social comedy of the opening scenes to a dramatic murder-and-chase finale around and over Lots Road Power Station (shot on location, with proto-noir lighting), *Underground* also offers fascinating vignettes of late-20s London life (all those hats, all those cigarettes), especially on the eponymous Tube system. More people than today, it seems, used to walk – or even run – up the escalators, but maybe that was just for the movie. Instructions to 'Step Off Right Foot First' have long gone, and open-top buses are tourists-only these days. And would a woman really have thrust her baby into the arms of a strange man in a bus queue without even asking?

Characterisation is a touch schematic: a nice guy (Brian Aherne), a nice girl (Elissa Landi), a nasty guy (Cyril McLaglen, less chunky younger brother of Victor) and his ex (Norah Baring), who serves as femme fatale. But the boldness of Asquith's visuals and the brio of his direction overcome any risk of banality. We get a gloriously rowdy barroom brawl with virtuosos rat-a-tat cutting, rapid subjective flashbacks and a moment of sweet expressionist poetry when the hero's and heroine's shadows act out the embrace they're too shy to melt into for real. But above all *Underground* is a celebration of everyday London and its people, on the Tube, on buses, in pubs, in

the streets, full of quirky affectionate cameos.

Disc: A triumph of near-pristine restoration by the BFI, thanks to a recently discovered Belgian archive print. There are two alternative newly commissioned scores – dynamically orchestral from Neil Brand or more sound-effect-based from Chris Watson.

WEIRD ADVENTURE

THE MONSTER OF HIGHGATE PONDS/THE BOY WHO TURNED YELLOW/A HITCH IN TIME

Alberto Cavalcanti/Michael Powell/Jan Darnley-Smith; UK 1961/72/78; BFI/Region 2 DVD; Certificate U; 56/52/54 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1/1.66:1/1.66:1 (anamorphic where necessary); Features: booklet

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

The third BFI Children's Film Foundation triple bill is of wider interest than the usual childhood-nostalgia market because it also preserves the last two features by Alberto Cavalcanti and Michael Powell. That said, CFF budgets couldn't realistically stretch to another *Went the Day Well?* or *The Red Shoes* – indeed, in the booklet, producer John Halas's daughter Vivien recalls an exasperated Cavalcanti wondering whether his career could fall any further.

However, while *The Monster of Highgate Ponds* is as ramshackle as its dragon-like subject (which evolves from a bath toy with stop-motion eyeballs and tongue to a rubber-suited man as it grows), there's plenty to enjoy. The obligatory villains are a pair of fairground workers pursuing the monster for commercial reasons, while the plucky heroes are impeccably RP-accented children who initially seem to pronounce 'fair men' as 'vermin'. Two years before *Doctor Who's* debut, a police box is used to summon officers who seem remarkably unfazed by the monster's presence in still highly recognisable London locations, even after it swipes one of their helmets.

The Boy Who Turned Yellow is the headline-grabber – not only Powell's swansong but also Emeric Pressburger's, the latter returning to children's cinema four decades after *Emil and the Detectives* (another imminent BFI release). The film offers the set's most convincingly rounded characters – not just hapless protagonist John Saunders but also future screenwriter Lem Dobbs (under his birth name Kitaj) as an unusually charismatic science geek. It's markedly more whimsical than the others (in the Tower of London, Beefeaters idly munch on beef between shifts) but has more genuine showstoppers – in particular, a scene in which an entire Tube train and its passengers turn garishly yellow.

While *A Hitch in Time* lacks the others' auteurist credentials, a script by Ealing comedy veteran T.E.B. Clarke and the canny casting of former Doctor Who Patrick Troughton as an eccentric inventor do at least ensure some entertainment value, even if the film's time-travelling-kids plot has since been comprehensively usurped by *Time Bandits* and *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure*, each boasting far better production values than this cheap 'n' cheerful blend of cardboard sets, coloured lights and the contents of a dressing-up box (felt moustaches and all).

Disc: The booklet includes essays by archivists, with engaging reminiscences from Powell, Vivien Halas and Dobbs.

THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

Granada/ITV: UK 1984-85; Llamantol/Region B Blu-ray; 632 minutes; Aspect Ratio 4:3

Reviewed by Sergio Angelini

In his memoir *A Study in Celluloid*, producer Michael Cox provides a fascinating account of how he convinced Granada to treat the work of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle with the same respect and reverence they'd shown Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* and Paul Scott's *Jewel in the Crown*. Production values would eventually suffer when the bean-counters took over, but not before the completion of this handsome 13-part series, in which the twitchy and flamboyant Jeremy Brett divines the vulnerability and humour behind the great detective's *Übermensch* facade while the beguilingly eager and devoted David Burke eschews buffoonery as his Boswell. Their dynamic performances, the patina of genuine literary fidelity and the plush visuals helped to revitalise the depiction of Holmes and Watson for a new generation of TV viewers who, by their millions, delighted again in watching the duo being bested by Irene Adler (Gayle Hunnicutt), wrangling with the speckled band and cracking the 'dancing men' code before the inexorable confrontation with Moriarty (Eric Porter) at the Reichenbach Falls. After 30 years, this thrilling love letter to Victorian pulp fiction remains utterly irresistible.

Disc: Otherwise only available on Blu-ray in an eye-wateringly expensive Japanese edition, this English-friendly Spanish release uses the same HD masters derived from the original 16mm camera negs. The results are generally superb, with deep blacks, rich colours and improved sharpness, though the average 15Mbps rate is on the lowish side. The five feature-length specials (most notably a fine version of *The Sign of Four*) and the follow-up series, all with Edward Hardwicke as a magnificent replacement for Burke, are also available. No extras.

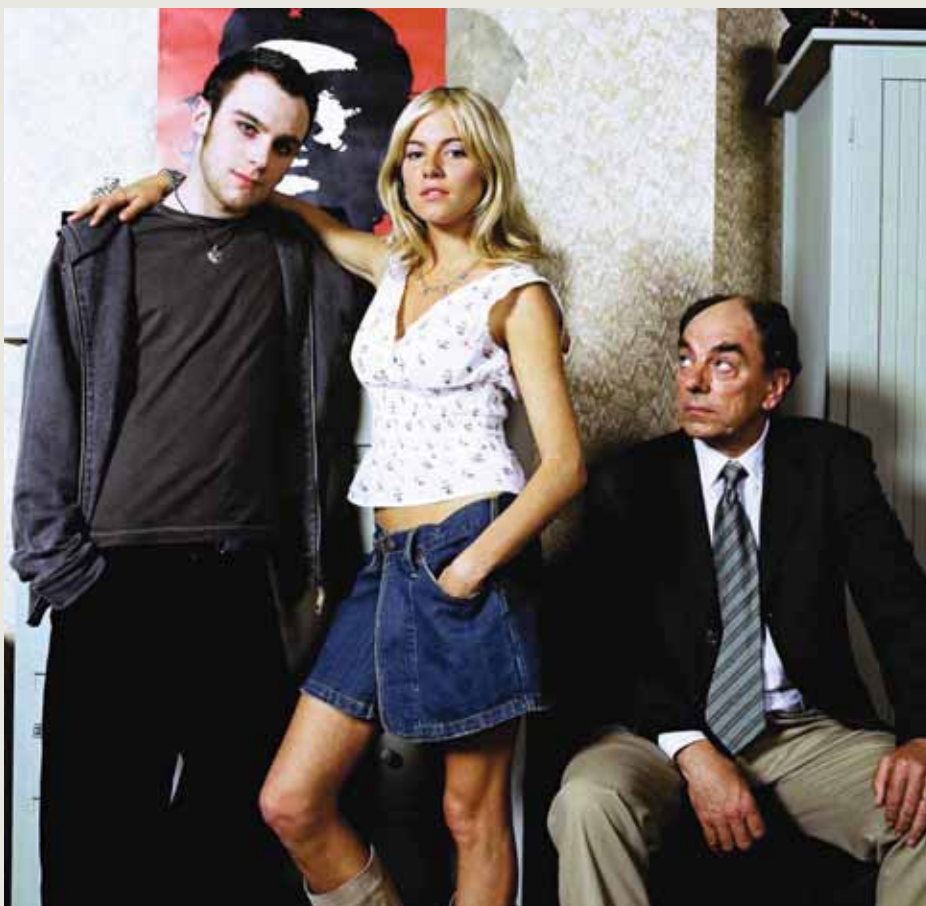
BEDTIME – THE COMPLETE SERIES

BBC: UK 2001-2003; Acorn Media/Region 2 DVD; 463 minutes; Certificate 15; Aspect Ratio 16:9; Features: Andy Hamilton interviews, picture gallery, text biographies

Reviewed by Sergio Angelini

Self-deception and role-play mix effortlessly with post-9/11 anxiety in this clever real-time comedy-drama by writer-director Andy Hamilton, set in the last 30 minutes of the day.

Sheila Hancock and Timothy West are figuratively and geographically the central couple in a trio of Ealing terraced houses, allowing Hamilton to flit from one pair of characters to another. In the first series, Hancock and the ever-cranky West ("I'd ban hoods, they're an admission of guilt") are worried about their daughter's failing marriage and troubled by the noise of the couple shagging next door, the latter becoming the object of Meera Syal's manipulative tabloid journo when the man in question is identified as an Alan Titchmarsh-style TV gardener. On the other side live Stephen Tompkinson and Claire Skinner, whose routine is disrupted by the ululations of their newborn infant and their own hidden demons, leading to a very memorable payoff. New neighbours arrive in the second series, with



Bedtime – The Complete Series

Sienna Miller's burglar-cum-model creates havoc in the lives of widower Alun Armstrong and his vulnerable son

Sienna Miller's burglar-cum-model creating havoc in the lives of widower Alun Armstrong and his vulnerable son; on the other side of an adjoining wall, media pundit Kevin McNally is put on the spot by his girlfriend, leading to another well-calibrated plot twist. For the abbreviated final series, set during the Christmas holidays, Hamilton added texture with a nuanced take on religious tolerance, again showcasing the thematic ballast for the smart one-liners. **Disc:** The anamorphic transfers are blemish-free. The extras include some 30 minutes of new interviews with Hamilton.

THE NEWSROOM – SEASON 1

HBO: USA 2012; Warner Home Video/Region B Blu-ray; 658 minutes; Certificate 15; Aspect Ratio 16:9; Features: audio commentaries, deleted scenes, 'Inside the Episode' introductions, featurettes

Reviewed by Sergio Angelini

This exploration of truth in the era of 'if it bleeds it leads' tabloid TV journalism harks back to the hallowed idealism of Cronkite and Morrow, and is described by writer-producer-creator Aaron Sorkin as having a swashbuckling spirit. 'Quixotic' might seem a more appropriate term for his attempt to reclaim the Fourth Estate from the gutter, but Sorkin typically pre-empts this with jokes about people's greater familiarity with

Man of La Mancha over the Cervantes original. Audaciously reconfiguring fact and fiction, this topical workplace drama revisits recent real-life events – the BP spill, phone hacking and the assassination of Osama bin Laden – in the context of the American culture wars. Set in the news division of a fictional cable channel (owned by Jane Fonda, who in private life used to be Mrs Ted Turner), the series spans 18 months, starting in early 2010 with a prologue in which the damaged news-anchor hero (Jeff Daniels) shatters an audience of college students by not agreeing with the proposition that America is the greatest country in the world. With the help of klutzy and principled ex-girlfriend Emily Mortimer (who, we are constantly and clumsily reminded, is American despite sounding like a Brit), he goes after the Tea Party (even though he's a Republican) and chases stories rather than ratings. It's often hilarious (there's a great riff on the implausibility of *Sex and the City*), and Sorkin dazzles with his trademark rat-a-tat patter and mastery of the narrative slow-boil, though some of the office-romance guff is strictly second-rate. **Disc:** The transfers are all impeccable, while the decent batch of supplements offers a useful cast and crew roundtable discussion; Sorkin is master of ceremonies here and in the commentaries and his brief on-camera intros for each episode.



A method combining intuition, experience, instinct and craft: Roeg with Julie Christie and Donald Sutherland on the set of *Don't Look Now*

THE ALCHEMIST AT WORK

THE WORLD IS EVER CHANGING

By Nicolas Roeg, Faber, 256 pp, £17.99, ISBN 9780571264933

Reviewed by Edward Lawrenson

"What follows is not a lecture." The admission, which begins Nicolas Roeg's entertaining account of his long career in film, is hardly necessary. Venerated though Roeg may be in his early eighties – even if admiration hasn't translated into funding for new projects since 2007's fascinating if flawed *Puffball* – it's hard to imagine him behind a lectern, making professorial pronouncements. Roeg's iconoclastic attitude was loudly announced from the start, by the controversy that greeted his 1970 debut *Performance*, an extraordinary mash-up of rock-star excess with East End gangsterism. The assault on 'good taste' staged by that

film – only glancingly mentioned by Roeg in his book's 200-plus pages (perhaps because of the blurred issue of authorship between Roeg and his co-director Donald Cammell) – reportedly caused the spouse of one studio executive to throw up at an early screening. But a more profound attack on, and questioning of, convention would underpin his entire body of work.

From the hallucinatory Gothic of *Don't Look Now* (1973) to the spectral SF of *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976), his films are dazzling stylistic enterprises that collapse the boundaries of sexual and social identity, the certainties of memory and the claims to truth of realist narrative. Unlike many British filmmakers, Roeg is unafraid of accusations of pretentiousness. And while his failures are often as striking as his successes, he's never boring. Roeg the filmmaker would never think to lecture his viewers; we'd expect the same from Roeg the published writer.

If not a lecture, what is *The World Is Ever Changing*? It's not quite a memoir, although it begins with a few biographical facts: born in London in 1928, Roeg seems to have fallen into

film, starting as an errand boy in Marylebone Studios. His recollection of working his way up the studio system to the position of sought-after director of photography (on titles such as *Fahrenheit 451*) evokes a genuine sense of excitement about learning his craft, as well as a rueful acknowledgement that this kind of apprenticeship has long vanished. And while Roeg nods towards personal disclosure, gossip even – in a typical bit of misdirection, he quotes from a letter Paul Theroux wrote him that refers to the director naked in the hotel room of a famous actress (unnamed) as her suitor (also unnamed) pleads to be let in – his book is too reticent to qualify as true autobiography.

The focus instead is on the filmmaking. In chapters divided by subject ('Image', 'Sound', 'Script' and more), Roeg offers his thoughts, reflections and nuts-and-bolts insights into his practice. The approach isn't especially rigorous: there is some repetition (criticism of which Roeg cannily pre-empts by advising us not to worry about "reading the book in progressive order"). And he can ramble. An early aside that he is

dictating the text into a camera is a giveaway, and may explain the occasional banality.

But I can't say any of this bothered me. The title is taken from a line in *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, but it's also a variation on a comment made in Lahore by a traditional storyteller, performing an improvised narrative to a rapt audience, when Roeg was working on the 1955 Ava Gardner picture *Bhowani Junction* (the book is full of such casual name-dropping): "The story's ever changing." Roeg isn't doctrinal about anything – this isn't a lecture, after all – but he does insist throughout on the difference between cinema and literature. It's tempting to see parallels between the oral culture of which that Lahore storyteller was part and the digressive, nonlinear sensibility of his films (interestingly, the milieus of two of his best-known movies, 1970's *Walkabout* and *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, are pre-literate and post-literate). In any event, the spoken-testimony form of the book is wonderfully well suited to capturing Roeg's distinct voice.

The results are highly absorbing, offering avuncular advice to aspiring filmmakers. Aware, perhaps, of the benefits he had in his youth as apprentice to established crew members, Roeg's most concrete bits of guidance tend to grow out of his recollections of working with directors from an earlier generation. He passes on a terrific

His most concrete bits of guidance grow out of his recollections of working with directors from an earlier generation

tip, for instance, from George Cukor on directing actors in pick-up shots; and there are references throughout to David Lean, with whom Roeg seems to have had a difficult relationship.

Of course, Roeg also talks about his own work. What surprises, given the uncompromising, singularly personal nature of his output, is his emphasis on the pragmatic, collaborative aspects of production. His thoughts on the importance of keeping his crew busy – even on shots he thinks he won't need – reveal a commanding grasp of the complicated dynamics of a film set, and suggest the benign influence of those early years on the studio floor. He's also attuned to the vagaries of the industry, like the moment Marlon Brando caused a big project to collapse because he was offended by a producer's telephone etiquette (an incident Roeg recounts without bitterness).

Roeg is a little more guarded in talking about his art beyond such practical considerations, and understandably so. This is an immensely absorbing book, delivered in a conversational style that is a breeze to read. It provides valuable glimpses of Roeg's working method, an alchemy of intuition and experience, instinct and craft (which might be distilled in his repeated encouragement to "be open to change"). But for all this, it's a testimony to the unique spell of the best of Roeg's films that their alluring mystery emerges undiminished – enhanced, even – after reading these 234 sparkling pages. ☺

HOLLYWOOD AND HITLER 1933-1939

By Thomas Doherty, Columbia University Press, 448pp, £24, ISBN 9780231163927

Reviewed by Philip French

A crucial decade in Hollywood, the 1930s were preceded by the parallel crises of the coming of sound and the Wall Street Crash, and ended with the industry gearing up for a war that had begun in Europe in 1939 (and was named World War Two by a Time Inc. journalist immediately after the December 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, when the United States and Japan joined the conflict). In his wide-ranging, scrupulously researched and highly entertaining study, Thomas Doherty, a professor of American Studies at Boston's Brandeis University, addresses a central issue of this period: the effect on the American film industry of Hitler's rise to power.

Although Doherty's title announces the book as starting in 1933, the year Hitler became Chancellor, he begins earlier by describing the special relationship of commercial rivalry, mutual respect and professional recruitment that brought such filmmakers as Ernst Lubitsch, Paul Leni and F.W. Murnau to Hollywood in the 1920s, and the important role that the German Jewish immigrant and pioneer movie mogul Carl Laemmle played in forging links with his native Germany as a generous post-war philanthropist. This link was first threatened in 1930, when Laemmle's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, a special project that his supporters believed would make him a serious candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize, was driven out of German cinemas after a campaign of disruption by Nazi brownshirts. This event was masterminded by Goebbels and the protestors' prophetic battle cry, as Doherty points out, was not "Amerikanfilm!" but "Judenfilm!"

An immediate effect of the creation of the Third Reich in 1933 was a vindictive institutionalised anti-Semitism. Within weeks, 296 of the 310 Jews employed by UFA, the country's dominant film studio, were fired. The vast majority went into exile, many of the most talented making their way to Hollywood. Censorship in Germany became arbitrarily draconian. Foreign films with Jewish producers or featuring undesirable gentiles like Marlene



Confessions of a Nazi Spy

Dietrich and Charlie Chaplin were banned; imported pictures were subject to special taxes. Hollywood, its studios dominated by Jewish immigrants or their immediate descendants, was slow to act. The movie moguls were convinced that Hitler would soon be exposed as a charlatan but also fearful of jeopardising their investment or fanning the flames of anti-Semitism, so they did nothing that might offend the new regime, playing down anything that might be identifiably Jewish. The Production Code, accepted in 1930 but not enforced until 1934, was under the control of the prominent Catholic layman Joseph Breen, and he was determined to protect the industry and public morality at all costs.

I Was a Captive of the Nazi Party, an ineffectual low-budget exploitation docudrama from a Poverty Row studio, managed to get a production seal. But the Breen Office, under constant pressure from the suave Dr Georg Gyssling, the German consul in Los Angeles, strangled or neutered any potential major projects at birth until 1939, when a carefully documented Warner Brothers production, *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (publicised as "the picture that calls a swastika a swastika") proved irresistible. Warners had been the only studio to take a firm stand against Nazism. Led by the outspoken Harry and Jack Warner, who were Jewish, the studio broke off relations with Germany in 1933 and subsequently produced a series of influential, Oscar-winning shorts on patriotic themes.

The chief opposition, however, came from the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League (HANL), an alliance of actors and filmmakers whose figureheads, the colourful left-wing screenwriters Donald Ogden Stewart and Dorothy Parker, initially received advice from the charismatic Soviet agent and arch intriguer Otto Katz. Coming soon after the moguls' unscrupulous campaign against the socialist author Upton Sinclair in California's 1934 gubernatorial election, HANL helped politicise Tinseltown, though as late as 1937 Cary Grant, Spencer Tracy and Bette Davis accepted invitations to an event welcoming Mussolini's son to Los Angeles.

Doherty does not restrict himself to Hollywood. He's instructive about pro-German audiences in the big cities (especially New York) and the films they saw, and he's dug up revealing information on the popular reception of newsreels. These usually took a week to reach America, and Doherty considers them to have been "more lap dogs than watch dogs" until they were challenged to do their journalistic duty by Henry Luce's bold *March of Time* documentaries. He also has a significant chapter on the coverage of the Spanish Civil War and the impact of the Soviet anti-Nazi film *Professor Mamlock* (which didn't need Breen's seal of approval).

Just as he has a prologue about the pre-Hitler years, Doherty ends his valuable book with a brief, suggestive coda on the wartime cinema, the continuing cult of Nazi chic in historical films and some reflections on *Inglourious Basterds*. With a certain ironic asperity he describes Tarantino's film as "an affectionate homage to the many hours of cinematic pleasure the Nazis have given moviegoers". ☺

TODD HAYNES

By Rob White, University of Illinois Press, 208pp, £14.99, ISBN 9780252079108

Reviewed by Ryan Gilbey

As a semiotics major at Brown, it is to be expected that Todd Haynes can talk a good movie. Fortunately he can make one too. His films, underpinned by formalist experimentation but too fizzy for the pleasure to be purely cerebral, have alternated between two modes: taut studies of women repressed or oppressed (*Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story*, *Safe*, *Far from Heaven*) and magpie-eyed, scrapbook-textured celebrations of highly strung, creative men (*Poison*, *Velvet Goldmine*, *I'm Not There*). His adaptation of Patricia Highsmith's *Carol*, which begins shooting this autumn, looks unlikely to break that pattern.

Rob White's book on Haynes, published in the Contemporary Film Directors series, scrutinises the six features to date along with the poignant 1993 short *Dottie Gets Spanked* and two bookend works with which I am unfamiliar – the short *Assassins: A Film Concerning Rimbaud* (1985) and the HBO miniseries *Mildred Pierce* (2011). What come through most strongly in White's careful shepherding of the director's themes, allusions and motifs are a continuity and strength of vision unequalled in modern US cinema. Steven Soderbergh (an executive producer on *Far from Heaven*, who tried to repeat that film's revisionism-as-homage trick on *The Good German*) is more powerful but also more diffuse. Gus Van Sant has been similarly diluted by his encounters with the mainstream. But Haynes's work exhibits Kubrickian levels of control that never smother its inherent playfulness.

White's book is sharp and attentive, especially when the writing is intensified by the focus on an individual frame. The discussion of what the author terms the "out-of-line family" shot (a typical Haynes composition signalling domestic discord) is the sort of fruitful idea that would benefit from the enhanced e-book treatment. A brief digression on the manner in which



Control and playfulness: Todd Haynes

audiences watch *Superstar*, which remains out of circulation, is typical of how the book can be most illuminating when it wanders seemingly off piste. Following a rhapsody about the film's life on faded bootleg VHS tapes, a screen-grab of the movie as it now appears online becomes the catalyst for a strain of mourning which feeds back into the fibre of the subject itself. "Looking at *Superstar* in its Google dollhouse, the latest sadness of this terribly sad film is that all its sadness should have come to this." The idea of how we watch, as well as what we watch, is returned to when Haynes discusses his excitement at making *Mildred Pierce* for an audience which was only "turn[ing] on the TV because Kate Winslet was on".

White's book is sharp and attentive, especially when the writing is intensified by the focus on an individual frame

While the form dictates an emphasis on the movies rather than the economic factors by which they are shaped, it still feels perverse to find room for a paragraph on how parts of *I'm Not There* remind the author of a moment in *Watership Down*, and yet not to include any reference to the financial difficulties under which Haynes still toils. In a new interview with White which provides the book's highpoint, Haynes mentions in passing "having a couple of rougher years" at the end of the 1990s, but it would have been helpful to touch on the turmoil here. "I wasn't happy," Haynes told me in 2007. "For a long time, I'd had this low-budget, throw-everything-you-have-into-your-work sensibility. I moved around a lot with shooting and never made a proper home for myself. After finishing *Velvet Goldmine*, I thought, 'Why did that have to be such a lonely, not-fun experience?' I love the film but it was hell to make. And when I got back to New York, it hit me that I didn't have the things my friends had – babies, nice apartments, stability." Even after the Oscar nominations for *Far from Heaven*, things had not improved. "*I'm Not There* was the toughest job I've ever had," he told me. "I actually wanted this to fold, to fall apart, more than I ever have on any film before. I couldn't imagine pulling it off given the budgetary restraints imposed on me. I felt the film was already a high-wire act, and now I was having to do it with both arms tied behind my back. But it wasn't a surprise; it was the height of the Bush-Cheney reign, so Hollywood was at its most conservative and fearful."

Haynes is similarly astute and articulate in his interview with White. The reader can feel his appreciation of the enquiries – it's a proper intellectual back-and-forth – and also the existence of a sustained argument. The matter of how form itself can be "gay" or "queer", with specific reference to the unorthodox structure of *Poison*, is an ongoing theme in the book, with the idea of New Queer Cinema addressed most pointedly. "I felt proud to be part of that group of filmmakers at that particular time," Haynes says, "but I felt that the form and style mattered more than the market. How one sees the world should define queerness rather than content (and rather than how many hot guys you could have in your movie)." ☺

100 YEARS AT THE PHOENIX

Archive of an Oxford Cinema 1913–2013

By Hiu M. Chan, Oxfordfolio, 260pp, £19.99, ISBN 9780956740557

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

Painstakingly assembled from microfiche newspaper listings, this is nothing more or less than a list of the 20,000-odd films that have been shown at the Oxford Phoenix, month by month, since it opened as the North Oxford Kinema a century ago. Probably the first publication of its kind, it is a revelation: a partial history of the cinema in Britain, and of the city and neighbourhood this particular cinema serves.

In 1913, Jericho was an industrial suburb built around the Oxford Canal, home to an ironworks and a printing press. Though the latter was (and is) Oxford University Press, the area was a mental

world away from the colleges to the south and east. By the 1920s, the Scala, as the NOK had become, was a community centre whose patrons were given tea and biscuits and took part in a kind of karaoke-cum-light-show between films; it was also cherished by slumming undergraduates, who were kept from the cheap seats.

In its account of the cinema's first two decades, this book is a record of what was in general circulation in Britain, within which non-US films stand out. During the 1930s, however, when the Scala became home to the local film society, Hollywood releases began to be double-billed with continental fare; and in the 1950s it became a full-fledged arthouse and repertory venue. How far this shift reflected or presaged the area's gentrification – the ironworks are flats now, the printers have departed OUP – or indicates a response to the collapse of the regular cinema audience are questions for historians.

100 Years at the Phoenix exists as a book but is easier to search as a pdf. Hiu M. Chan's exemplary work ought to be replicated for every cinema and ex-cinema in the land – indeed,

everywhere films have been shown – and the results should be linked with each other online. Mechanically reproduced arts such as film, said Walter Benjamin, lack "presence in time and space", substituting "a plurality of copies for a unique existence"; but each of those copies, finite in number, was seen in unique conditions. ☺

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Phoenix from the ashes: Oxford's arthouse

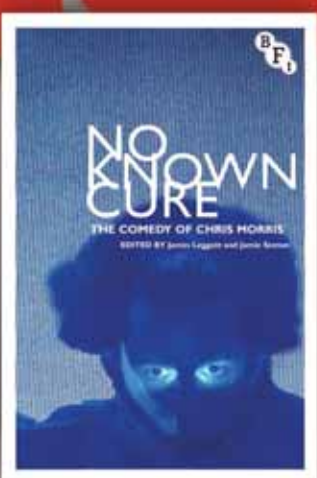
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AFTER DRACULA

The 1930s Horror Film

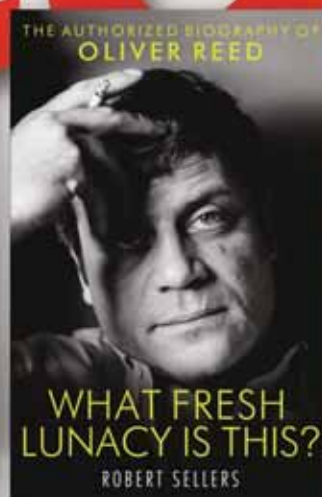
By Alison Peirse, I.B. Tauris, 224pp, paperback, £16.99, ISBN 9781848855311
After Dracula tells of films set in London music halls and Yorkshire coal mines, South Sea islands and Hungarian modernist houses of horror, with narrators that travel in space and time from contemporary Paris to ancient Egypt. Alison Peirse argues that *Dracula* (1931) has been canonised to the detriment of other innovative and original 1930s horror films in Europe and America. She reveals a cycle of films made over the 1930s that includes *Werewolf of London*, *The Man Who Changed His Mind*, *Island of Lost Souls* and *Vampyr*. This historical account reveals wide disparities across horror filmmaking in the 1930s and brings to light a cycle of films many of which have languished forgotten and unloved – until now.
www.ibtauris.com



NO KNOWN CURE

The Comedy of Chris Morris

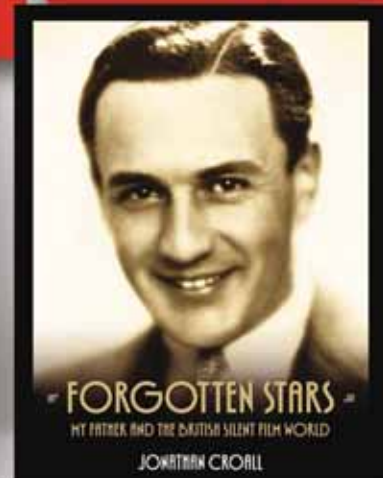
Edited by James Leggott and Jamie Sexton, BFI Publishing/Palgrave Macmillan, 272pp, paperback, £16.99, ISBN 9781844574797
 This is the news! Chris Morris is one of the most singular and controversial figures in recent UK media, at one point being described as the “most hated man in Britain” for his corrosive media satire. With shows such as the notorious spoof *Brass Eye*, this writer, performer, DJ and director has not only pushed boundaries of taste and acceptability but altered perceptions of current-affairs broadcasting, moral panics and celebrity culture. At the same time, cult programmes such as *Blue Jam*, *Jam* and *Nathan Barley* pushed sketch comedy and sitcom to their limits. In the first full-length book on the comedy of Chris Morris, writers discuss his DJ career, his pioneering radio satire, his experimental black comedy and his move into filmmaking with *Four Lions*.
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WHAT FRESH LUNACY IS THIS?

The Authorized Biography of Oliver Reed

By Robert Sellers, Constable, 512pp, hardback, illustrated, £20, ISBN 9781472101129
 Oliver Reed is remembered by many as a volatile, hard-living talent who was lost too soon, a man whose off-screen antics often overshadowed those on-screen. The persona he created was so charismatic that often he felt obliged to act it out in the public arena, perpetuating the hellraiser myth. For the first time, Reed's close family has collaborated on a project about Reed himself, revealing a complex man behind the facade, a person of great passions and loyalties underscored by deep-rooted vulnerabilities and insecurities. With never-before-heard anecdotes and new interviews with family, friends and peers, *What Fresh Lunacy Is This?* is a revealing examination of his mould-breaking personality.
www.constablerobinson.com



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My Father and the British Silent Film World

By Jonathan Croall, Fantom Publishing, 240pp, hardback, illustrated, £19.99, ISBN 9781781960912
 Drawing on a previously unseen family archive, biographer Jonathan Croall explores the rapid rise to film stardom of his father, John Stuart. He also focuses on other 1920s stars and the pressures they faced from fans, the press and Hollywood. He explores the pioneering work of such directors as Hitchcock, Elvey, Asquith and Saville, and describes the impact, often tragic, of the coming of sound on the careers of the stars. “A fascinating account of a remarkable man, which also sheds valuable light on this period of cinema history.” (Kevin Brownlow)
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READERS' LETTERS

Letters are welcome, and should be addressed to the Editor at *Sight & Sound*, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN Fax: 020 7436 2327 Email: S&S@bfi.org.uk

FITZGERALD MYSTERY

Other *Sight & Sound* readers who, like me, have been fascinated by Nick James's article 'Which Side of Paradise?' (*S&S*, June), about the filming of F. Scott Fitzgerald's novels, may find the following of interest. 1950 saw the publication of the novel *The Disenchanted* by Hollywood screenwriter Budd Schulberg (best known for his later screenplays for Elia Kazan's films *On the Waterfront* and *A Face in the Crowd*). It's a fictionalisation of the dying days of the alcoholic, self-destructive novelist (here renamed Manley Halliday) as he tries to restore his lost literary fortune with a studio assignment to co-operate on a Hollywood screenplay. Based on Schulberg's own personal experiences of collaborating with Fitzgerald on a real-life screenwriting venture, the novel is propelled by a compelling narrative and ends, powerfully and movingly, with the death of Halliday/Fitzgerald.

John Owston, Southall, Middlesex

BEYOND OUR KEN

I was recently reading an old edition of *Sight & Sound*. The article ('From Screen to Screen', *S&S*, Autumn 1957) was about showing old cinema films on television, a new thing at the time. In the article there was a reference to the Marx Brothers' last film as a team, *Love Happy* (1950), which was one of the first films to be shown on television in this country. *Love Happy* was banned in Britain for a while because one of the co-screenwriters, Ben Hecht, had made some unpleasant comments about British soldiers during the Palestine troubles. *Love Happy* is not one of the Marx Brothers' best films but there was a brief appearance by a then unknown Marilyn Monroe.

In *Sight & Sound* in 1951 there was a review of *Love Happy* by Kenneth Tynan, who said, "It fails to please." In fact, Tynan was not a Marx Brothers fan anyway. He made this clear in an earlier article in *S&S* in the same year. Tynan did not get the Marx Brothers' humour and in the article he wrote, "Groucho owed much to (co-screenwriter) S.J. Perelman." In fact, Groucho had been doing that kind of humour long before he worked with Perelman.

Tynan was not the right person to review *Love Happy*. He was very good on drama and musicals, but he was not so good on comedy – though, of course, humour is a personal thing.

Roy Mills, Hornchurch, Essex

CAPTION CLARIFICATIONS

I read 'Eye Tunes' (*S&S*, May) with interest. But there are a couple of errors in the captions, which may not be the author's fault. The frame the caption says belongs to *Entr'acte* is actually from *Ballet mécanique*. And the double frame from (according to the caption) a *Screen Test* belongs to Warhol's *Outer and Inner Space* (moreover, it has been printed wrongly, left to right).

I would also like to add a significant music video to Sam Davies's list of videos that "can be traced back to Andy Warhol's *Screen Tests*": R.E.M.'s

LETTER OF THE MONTH A FEAR IN ENGLAND



While it was nice to see Kim Newman usefully situate Ben Wheatley's *A Field in England* alongside other representations of dark, horrific British landscapes ('This Spectred Isle', *S&S*, July), I don't think it is totally accurate to suggest that British cinema overlooks England "entirely" when locating "magical, savage pockets of rural lore". From the early 1970s a number of films did precisely this. The brutal Cornwall of *Straw Dogs* (1973) most obviously springs to mind, but so too does Jerzy Skolimowski's wonderful *The Shout* (1978, above), which was shot in remote north Devon and features Alan Bates as a man with the extraordinary ability to kill with his shout.

Indeed, several strange, unsettling films of that period make much of peripheral, coastal English locations. For example, Hywel Bennett discovers that his new house has been built in a haunted Devon locale in *Endless Night* (1972). Peter Sasdy's film version of *Doomwatch* (1972) is set on the strange, fictional island Balfe (seemingly off Cornwall). A mysterious beach on the Isle of Wight provides the creepy Peter Finch with a home in *Something to Hide* (1971). And Jersey is used to eerie effect in *Neither the Sea nor the Sand* (1972), in which Susan Hampshire's undead lover (Michael Petrovich) disintegrates before her eyes.

Paul Newland, Aberystwyth University

'We All Go Back to Where We Belong' (2011) is not only a black-and-white portrait reminiscent of Warhol's *Screen Tests*, but the person portrayed is none other than John Giorno, the poet who starred in Warhol's *Sleep* and in a couple of *Screen Tests*, clearly paid homage to in the video.

Alberte Pagán, by email

CLEMENT WEATHER

I was astonished by the 'Letter of the Month' (*S&S*, March), in which David Melville accuses the *nouvelle vague* of rejecting René Clément out of homophobia.

First, I strongly suggest that he reread Truffaut and Godard's articles from the 1950s in which they criticise the French cinematographic establishment. They had far more serious and rational reasons than homophobia.

Second, where in hell did Mr Melville learn that René Clément was gay? His reputation was of a 100 per cent heterosexual. Maybe Mr Melville was confusing him with Marcel Carné, who was quite openly gay and even succeeded in making Jean Gabin, another arch-straight guy, "play unknowingly the part of a fag in *L'Air de Paris*" – to quote his co-star in that film, Arletty.

Antonio Rodrigues, Programming Department, Cinemateca Portuguesa

PORNOGRAPHER NICKED

I was about to decry the amount of space given *Spring Breakers*, the latest discordant dreck to issue from Harmony Korine (*S&S*, May). However, the invaluable Nick Pinkerton's wise review mitigated my ire. Given the rush to acclaim Korine, who is at best a soft-core pornographer with the pretensions of an arthouse provocateur, Pinkerton's criticism sheds welcome light on what's really going on in *Spring Breakers*. I have no axe to grind with sexploitation in cinema but it is repellent when packaged as anything more meaningful than the director pleasuring himself from undressing young stars. But as he dared to do in his review of that even worse piece of overrated nonsense, *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (*S&S*, November 2012), Pinkerton again emerges as a voice of sanity against the wanton praise of the benighted cheerleaders whom Korine has seduced.

Ralph Hammann, Williamstown, USA

Additions and corrections

July p.71 *Before Midnight*, Cert 15, 108m 44s, 9,786 ft +0 frames; p.72 *The Call*, Cert 15, 94m 15s, 8,482 ft +8 frames; p.73 *Chasing Mavericks*, Cert PG, 116m 19s, 10,468 ft +8 frames; p.82 *Paradise Love*, Cert 18, 120m 37s, 10,855 ft +8 frames; p.83 *Renoir*, Cert 12A, 111m 44s, 10,056 ft +0 frames; p.85 *Stand Up Guys*, Cert 15, 94m 52s, 8,538 ft +0 frames; p.90 *The Wall*, Cert 12A, 107m 59s, 9,718 ft +8 frames; p.92 009 *ReCyborg*, Cert 12A, 103m 18s, 9,297 frames +0 frames

BEING THERE



Scripted mid-shoot, the last 30 seconds of Hal Ashby's 1979 film startle the audience into reconsidering its assumptions

By Thirza Wakefield

"Life is a state of mind," reads President 'Bobby' (Jack Warden) from a prompt sheet at the funeral of his advisor Ben Rand. It's the last line of director Hal Ashby's *Being There* (1979), one which resounds importantly over the Rand estate, carrying down to the lake where our protagonist Chance (Peter Sellers) has wandered apart from his fellow mourners. To this solemnising voiceover he ambles, dark-suited, by the edge of the pond, pulls a pine sapling free of a fallen branch and, turning to look at the mansion in the distance, steps purposefully out onto the lake. The camera fixes square on the scene as Chance walks 14, 15 paces across the surface of the water then, pausing to look about his feet, bends to try its depth with a black umbrella: three feet deep. Straightening out again, glancing up at the sky as he does so, Chance splashes further out.

It's a miraculous ending to a secular film: a conclusion that stuns by its bravura and by running counter not to the tone of the film, which is consistently multiform, but to our assimilation of the narrative so far. This marvel of physics – *Being There's* first and only supernatural spectacle, compressed into its final half-minute – raises as many questions as it seems instantaneously to choke, as religion can. As the picture *pfffts* to black, echoing the film's so many television sets, we have only ourselves to ask: who exactly is Chance and, in the end, does it matter? We first meet Chance

(magnificently played by a silver-haired Sellers in his penultimate role before his death in 1980) routinely ensconced at the home where he's lived and worked as a gardener since boyhood. Following the death of his "old man" employer, he's turned out on the street by callous kid-lawyer Franklin and, for the first time in his memory, leaves the confines of the timeworn Washington townhouse – with no life experience but that which he's absorbed from TV and "rice pudding between the ears". Eumir Deodato's jazz-funk appropriation of the 2001: *A Space Odyssey* theme, 'Also Sprach Zarathustra', attends his departure. For Chance, the seedy DC district at the foot of his stoop may as well be the moon: his final frontier.


Of all the improbable places, Chance plants his flag in the unforgiving soil of the political world and, to our surprise and amusement, meets with great success. Amid the sophistry and subterfuge of Capitol Hill, Chance's seeming "good, solid sense" shines like a light. Rand (Melvyn Douglas), who is dying and finds comfort in Chance's "admirable balance", mistakes straightforward talk of gardens for an allegory on America's small businesses and primes an impressionable President to find in Chance the allied optimist he's been looking for.

None of these great men has an inkling of Chance's peculiar origins; we do, so we laugh at the error of their judgement. That is, until Ashby's ending forces us to re-evaluate what we thought we knew – everything we supposed

We experience Chance's special appeal first hand and unmediated. It's a giddy freedom

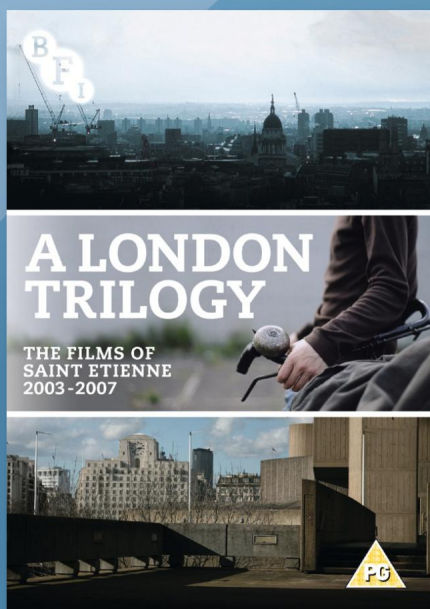
we were watching. When Chance walks on water, Ashby permits us to feel what the film's supporting characters have felt all along. Did they ever overprize Chance? Was he always a miracle worker, a Christ figure with the power to dissolve and purge the needs and desires of everybody he meets? In Ashby's ending, we experience his special appeal first hand and unmediated. It's a giddy freedom.

In another – not necessarily contradictory – reading, the film's ending is farce. *Being There's* video researcher, Dianne Schroeder, sourced a varied and bizarre selection of contemporary television extracts, gawped at by Chance at intervals throughout the film. So have we switched (on) to TV, Chance's window on the world, in these last 30 seconds and are now watching fantasy? Is Chance any weirder than children's presenter Fred Rogers in full voice; his walking on water any more uncanny than the guttural baying of a fame-starved wannabe, naked to the waist in war paint, on a 1970s prime-time talent show? Watching *Being There* today reminds us of Peter Weir's *The Truman Show*: that film's ending, with Truman ankle-deep in ocean, must have been influenced by the earlier picture and Ed Harris's director's prologue could as well refer to Chance: "While the world he inhabits is in some respects counterfeit, there's nothing fake about Truman himself."

Ashby decided on the ending halfway into filming (it differs from the scripted finale and that of the source novel, both written by Jerzy Kosinski) and fell out with producers Lorimar in trying to get it approved. It's hard to fathom what all the fuss was about. Ashby's invention doesn't change the film or its hero; it changes us, his audience. After all, Chance remains Chance, whether he's walking on water or walking on the ground. 

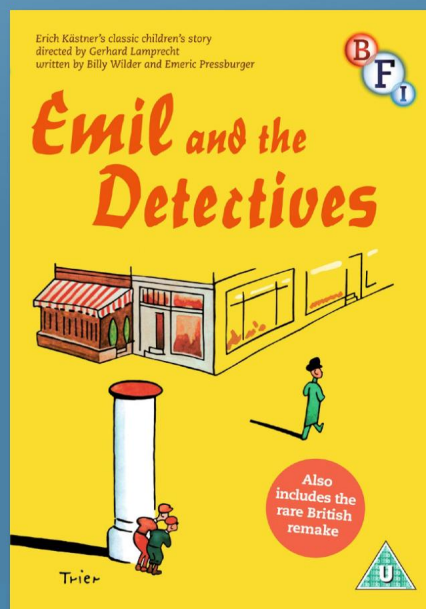


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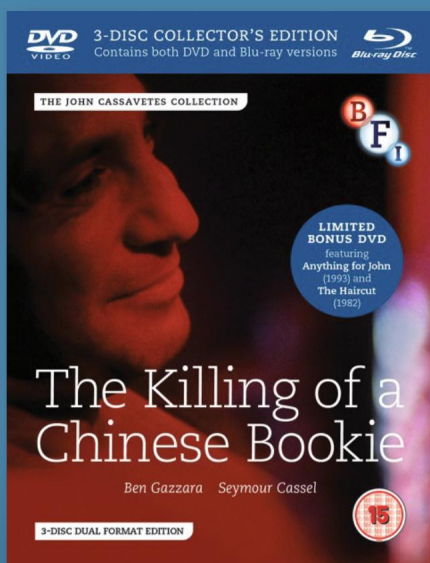
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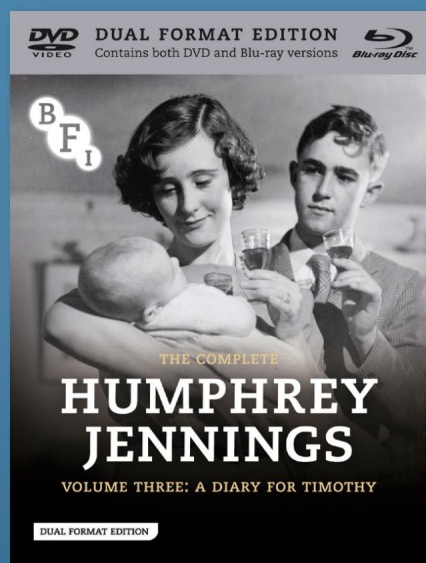
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